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[COMMITTEE PRINT]

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UNITED STATES-VIETNAM RELATIONS  
1945-1967

STUDY PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

BOOK 2 OF 12

DO NOT DESTROY  
30 DAY LOAN  
RETURN TO SAMID  
RM 1D 384 PENTAGON



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Printed for the use of the House Committee on Armed Services



[COMMITTEE PRINT]

UNITED STATES-VIETNAM RELATIONS  
1945-1967

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STUDY PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE



Printed for the use of the House Committee on Armed Services

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON : 1971

67-244 O



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NINETY-SECOND CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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ONETA L. STOCKSTILL, *Executive Secretary*



## INTRODUCTION

The following is the unclassified text of the 1968 Department of Defense study, "United States Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," popularly known as the Pentagon Papers.

At the time the existence of this study became known, through unauthorized public disclosures, the Committee on Armed Services requested a copy of the study, which was provided to the Committee and which has been continually available for inspection by Members of Congress. At the same time, as Chairman of the Armed Services Committee and with the concurrence of the senior minority member, Rep. Leslie C. Arends, I asked the Department of Defense to declassify the study on an expedited basis so that it could be made available to Members of Congress and to the American people.

I am now directing that it be printed as a Committee document and that a copy be provided to each Member of the House of Representatives. Copies will also be on sale to the public at the Government Printing Office. The 12-volume text here contains the first 43 volumes of the original 47-volume study. The last four volumes have not as yet been declassified because they deal with negotiations which are still in progress.

F. EDW. HÉBERT, *Chairman,*  
*Committee on Armed Services.*



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
*Washington, D.C., September 20, 1971.*

Honorable F. EDWARD HÉBERT,  
*Chairman, Committee on Armed Services*  
*House of Representatives*  
*Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: In accordance with the discussions which took place at the time of the delivery to the Congress of the classified version of the 47-volume 1968 study of "U.S. Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967," we are transmitting herewith for your use four sets of the declassified study. You will note that the declassified review contains 43 volumes. The last four volumes of the 47-volume set have not been declassified because they deal exclusively with sensitive negotiations seeking peace and the release of prisoners of war. Their disclosure would adversely affect continuing efforts to achieve those objectives.

As I am sure you can appreciate, the review of approximately 7,000 pages has been a difficult task, complicated by the pattern of prior unauthorized disclosures and pending and potential actions in the courts. Of course, some of the material has been declassified solely on the basis of prior disclosures. The review has been accomplished on an expedited basis in order to comply with your request for the material on a declassified basis for hearings which the Congress has indicated are in prospect. Because of the time constraint imposed on the review, it is possible, even probable, that errors of omission and commission have been made during the review. This, however, represents the best possible effort taking into consideration the time available and the numerous complicating factors which influenced the review. Other than the last four volumes, we have been able to make available to you in unclassified form the bulk of the study.

Sincerely,

RADY A. JOHNSON,  
*Assistant to the Secretary for Legislative Affairs.*



**FINAL REPORT—OSD Task Force, Vietnam**  
**and**  
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## OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

### MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THROUGH: Mr. Paul C. Warnke, ASD/ISA

Dr. Morton H. Halperin, DASD/Policy Planning and Arms Control/ISA

SUBJECT: Final Report, OSD Vietnam Task Force

*15 January 1969.*

On June 17, 1967, Secretary Robert S. McNamara directed that a Task Force be formed to study the history of United States involvement in Vietnam from World War II to the present. Mr. McNamara's guidance was simply to do studies that were "encyclopedic and objective." With six full-time professionals assigned to the Task Force, we were to complete our work in three months. A year and a half later, and with the involvement of six times six professionals, we are finally done to the tune of thirty-seven studies and fifteen collections of documents contained in forty-three volumes.

In the beginning, Mr. McNamara gave the Task Force full access to OSD files, and the Task Force received access to CIA materials, and some use of State Department cables and memoranda. We had no access to White House files. Our guidance prohibited personal interviews with any of the principal participants.

The result was not so much a documentary history, as a history based solely on documents—checked and rechecked with ant-like diligence. Pieces of paper, formidable and suggestive by themselves, could have meant much or nothing. Perhaps this document was never sent anywhere, and perhaps that one, though commented upon, was irrelevant. Without the memories of people to tell us, we were certain to make mistakes. Yet, using those memories might have been misleading as well. This approach to research was bound to lead to distortions, and distortions we are sure abound in these studies.

To bring the documents to life, to fill in gaps, and just to see what the "outside world" was thinking, we turned to newspapers, periodicals, and books. We never used these sources to supplant the classified documents, but only to supplement them. And because these documents, sometimes written by very clever men who knew so much and desired to say only a part and sometimes written very openly but also contradictorily, are not immediately self-revealing or self-explanatory, we tried

both to have a number of researchers look at them and to quote passages liberally. Moreover, when we felt we could be challenged with taking something out of context, we included the whole paper in the Documentary Record section of the Task Force studies (Parts V and VI. A and B). Again seeking to fend off inevitable mistakes in interpretation and context, what seemed to us key documents were reviewed and included in several overlapping in substance, but separate, studies.

The people who worked on the Task Force were superb—uniformly bright and interested, although not always versed in the art of research. We had a sense of doing something important and of the need to do it right. Of course, we all had our prejudices and axes to grind and these shine through clearly at times, but we tried, we think, to suppress or compensate for them.

These outstanding people came from everywhere—the military services, State, OSD, and the "think tanks." Some came for a month, for three months, for six months, and most were unable, given the unhappiness of their superiors, to finish the studies they began. Almost all the studies had several authors, each heir dutifully trying to pick up the threads of his predecessor. In all, we had thirty-six professionals working on these studies, with an average of four months per man.

The quality, style and interest of the studies varies considerably. The papers in Parts I, II, III, and IV.A, concerning the years 1945 to 1961 tend to be generally non-startling—although there are many interesting tidbits. Because many of the documents in this period were lost or not kept (except for the Geneva Conference era) we had to rely more on outside resources. From 1961 onwards (Parts IV.B and C and VI.C), the records were bountiful, especially on the first Kennedy year in office, the Diem coup, and on the subjects of the deployment of ground forces, the decisions surrounding the bombing campaign against North Vietnam, US-GVN relations, and attempts at negotiating a settlement of the conflict.



Almost all the studies contain both a Summary and Analysis and a Chronology. The chronologies highlight each important event or action in the monograph by means of date, description, and documentary source. The Summary and Analysis sections, which I wrote, attempt to capture the main themes and facts of the monographs—and to make some judgments and speculations which may or may not appear in the text itself. The monographs themselves stick, by and large, to the documents and do not tend to be analytical.

Writing history, especially where it blends into current events, especially where that current event is Vietnam, is a treacherous exercise. We could not go into the minds of the decision-makers, we were

not present at the decisions, and we often could not tell whether something happened because someone decided it, decided against it, or most likely because it unfolded from the situation. History, to me, has been expressed by a passage from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* where he writes: "This is a world of chance, free will, and necessity—all interweavingly working together as one; chance by turn rules either and has the last featuring blow at events." Our studies have tried to reflect this thought; inevitably in the organizing and writing process, they appear to assign more and less to men and free will than was the case.

LESLIE H. GELB,  
*Chairman, OSD Task Force.*

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LESLIE H. GELB,  
*Chairman, OSD Task Force.*





# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

TV. A. 4.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

US TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE  
NATIONAL ARMY, 1954 - 1959

U.S. TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY, 1954-1959

SUMMARY

"Hanoi was evacuated on 9 October [1954]. The [U.S. liaison] team left with the last French troops, disturbed by what they had seen of the grim efficiency of the Viet Minh in their takeover, the contrast between the silent march of the victorious Viet Minh troops in their tennis shoes and the clanking armor of the well-equipped French whose western tactics and equipment had failed against the communist military-political-economic campaign." 1/

Up to 1960, Vietnam was one of the largest recipients of U.S. economic and military assistance in the world: the third ranking non-NATO recipient of aid, the seventh ranking worldwide. The U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (MAAG), was the only military mission commanded by a lieutenant general; the U.S. economic aid mission in Vietnam was the largest anywhere. In the years 1955 through 1960, more than \$2 billion in aid flowed into Vietnam, and more than 80% of that assistance went toward providing security for the Government of Vietnam. Nonetheless, in 1960 the Joint Chiefs of Staff determined that the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF) were inadequately trained and organized, and directed urgent action by MAAG to improve their anti-guerrilla capabilities. 2/

Thus, despite the massive U.S. investment in aid to Vietnam in the period 1954-1960, very little had been accomplished in the way of fashioning South Vietnamese forces into a suitable instrument for countering the "communist military-political-economic campaign" aimed at overturning the Government of Vietnam.

The principal issue examined here is that of the role and effectiveness of U.S. advice and assistance provided the armed forces of the GVN prior to 1960.

The principal focus is on American assistance to the Vietnamese National Army -- subsequently the ARVN -- although plans and support for the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps are also considered. Subsidiary questions include:

- Why did the U.S. undertake the training of ARVN?
- How was this decision taken?

- What was the threat to South Vietnam?
- What was the mission of the South Vietnamese army?
- What was the state of the South Vietnamese army?
- How did the U.S. go about altering this condition?
- Did U.S. assistance through 1960 result in creation of South Vietnamese army in the image of the U.S. army?

The principal conclusion is that U.S. efforts in the period 1954-1959 failed to produce an effective Vietnamese counterinsurgent force due to contemporary perceptions of and reactions to the threat, to exaggerated estimates of the value and relevance of American military standards in responding to that threat, to lack of effective bargaining techniques vis-a-vis the Government of Vietnam, and to fragmentation and other inadequacies in the American system of determining and administering the overall program of assistance to Vietnam.

U.S. efforts in the period 1954-1960 to create an effective South Vietnamese military establishment -- and particularly an effective National Army -- were critically affected by the following considerations:

-- The reasons the U.S. undertook the training of the Vietnamese armed forces had their roots not only in the desire to contain communism and preserve the freedom of South Vietnam, but also in U.S. discontent and frustration with French military policy during the Indochina War. A strong desire to correct French mistakes generated considerable bureaucratic momentum; preoccupation with the perceived inadequacies of French practices led to underestimation of the problems the French had to overcome -- including that of internal division and governmental reluctance -- in developing an effective Vietnamese army, and to overcorrection of French mistakes by the creation of a conventional military force. That Vietnamese army came to be organized in divisions -- as the U.S. had so often and so unsuccessfully urged the French to do -- that would have the capability to perform well against the Viet Minh divisions in the Red River Delta in 1954, or presumably against their post-1954 equivalent, communist divisions crossing the 17th parallel. But the French Indochina War was over; circumstances had radically changed.

-- The decision to train the South Vietnamese military was based on a compromise between the Departments of State and Defense in which "political considerations" which had nothing to do with the military objections to an affirmative decision,



and did not in any way affect the probability of success of the undertaking, were allowed to govern rather than considerations of limitations in U.S. resources and capabilities, and the basic difficulty of the task at hand. Increasingly a characteristic of U.S. decision making, such compromise maximized the probability of consistently selecting the least desirable course of action.

-- The threat to Vietnam was perceived as constituted of the sects and the Viet Minh residue in the South, and the regular forces of the DRV in the North; although it was consistently estimated that the DRV had the capability to overrun South Vietnam, it was just as consistently estimated that the DRV neither needed nor intended to do so. Nonetheless, U.S. doctrine regarding estimates of capability as opposed to estimates of intention with its characteristic emphasis on Order of Battle data (so small a part of the real intelligence problem in counterinsurgency) led to fixation upon the more massive, but less likely, threat of overt invasion.

-- The dual mission expected of the Vietnamese army of internal and external defense was, given resource and trained manpower limitations, internally inconsistent. Given the state of U.S. strategic thinking in the 1950's, the nature of SEATO, the withdrawal of the FEC, the pressures exerted by Diem, and the background of the U.S. MAAG, rooted in the recent Korean experience, it was virtually certain to lead to a conventional military establishment designed to counter a conventional threat. It did. In fact, given the strength of these influences and the lack of U.S. familiarity with effective counterinsurgent techniques, it is questionable whether assignment of a single mission related exclusively to internal security would have made any difference in the type of military establishment that resulted.

-- The South Vietnamese army was in extremely poor condition in 1954; its prospects were worse, in view of the limited resources, particularly in terms of personnel, the U.S. was able to devote to its reorganization and training. In addition, as the JCS stated, "Unless the Vietnamese themselves show an inclination to make individual and collective sacrifices required to resist Communism, which they have not done to date, no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay complete Communist victory in South Vietnam." \* There was no overwhelming change in the willingness to sacrifice during the late 1950's, which added to the already formidable task of creating an effective military establishment.

-- The way in which the U.S. MAAG went about creating an effective military establishment had four principal characteristics:

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\* Memorandum for SecDef from JCS, "Indochina," 17 November 1954 (TS).

concentration on the mission of resistance to overt aggression; training from the top down; employment of U.S. standards and techniques; and optimistic assessment of the future capabilities of paramilitary organizations outside the purview of MAAG.

-- The result of U.S. efforts was more a reflection of the U.S. military establishment than of the type of threat or terrain. With regard to the overall effectiveness of U.S. aid, it seems to have had, unfortunately, all the depth the term "mirror image" implies. Furthermore, U.S. performance in creating an effective Vietnamese military establishment was adversely affected by the lack of well-founded bargaining techniques vis-a-vis the Government of Vietnam, and by fragmentation and other inadequacies in the American system of determining and administering the overall program of assistance.

-- The U.S. quickly became so deeply and so overtly committed to the Diem government that any leverage inherent in the assistance program rapidly approached zero. Perhaps the best illustration of the lack of leverage concerning the defense establishment is the case of the Civil Guard, in which the principal effects of the U.S. bargaining were negative and most directly affected the very organization the U.S. was trying to improve.

-- The case of the Civil Guard, a primary internal security force, also affords excellent examples of two sorts of fragmentation affecting the U.S. effort: U.S. interagency competition (the CG was ultimately transferred to the MOD on the advice of MAAG, but against not only the prior advice of the MSU advisory team but also against the wishes of the Embassy)\*; and lack of coordination at Embassy level by which the entire military assistance effort could be evaluated and resources more rationally allocated (the Civil Guard was evaluated completely differently by MAAG and by the Embassy).

-- A third variety of fragmentation is revealed in the relations between Washington and its various representatives in the field. Both the GVN and the several U.S. agencies relied heavily on Washington for arbitration of disputes

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\* Fragmentation in the U.S. community had an obvious and adverse effect on the U.S. capability to bargain with the GVN. By devoting minimal care to the selection of the U.S. official he would talk to first, Diem could often become the arbiter of, rather than a participant in, the bargaining process. Thus General Williams: "I can't remember one time that President Diem ever did anything of importance concerning the military that I recommended against." "Why U.S. Is Losing in Vietnam," U.S. News and World Report, November 9, 1964.



generated in Saigon, Diem carrying his position to the highest levels of the agency of his choice, while U.S. representatives had to seek protagonists at various levels within their own agencies. The implications for U.S. policy in the field are obvious.

Because of the divisions and diversions inherent in the above, U.S. aid in the period up to 1960 failed to produce an effective counterinsurgent force either within the National Army, or in the paramilitary organizations. This is not to imply that had resources been diverted from the creation of a conventional army to that of an effective counterinsurgent force the problem of Vietnam would have been solved, for the enemy has demonstrated both versatility and flexibility that would render such a statement vacuous. It is to suggest, however, that given the world situation in the period of relevance and the situation in Southeast Asia, it seems likely that the DRV, whatever strategic alternative it might have elected to follow, would not have been deterred from overt aggression by any army of Vietnam it was within U.S.-GVN capability to create. An effective counterinsurgent force, on the other hand, might have limited its choices: might well have prevented effective prosecution of the guerrilla alternative the Viet Cong and the DRV did elect to follow.



PRINCIPAL PERSONALITIES, 1954-1960

UNITED STATES

<u>OFFICE</u>	<u>TERM OF OFFICE</u>	<u>NAME</u>
President	20 Jan 1953 - 20 Jan 1961	Dwight D. Eisenhower
Secretary of State	21 Jan 1953 - 15 Apr 1959	John Foster Dulles
"	16 Apr 1959 - 20 Jan 1961	Christian A. Herter
Ambassador to GVN	25 Jun 1952 - 20 Apr 1955	Donald R. Heath
"	20 Apr 1955 - 14 Mar 1957	C. Frederick Reinhart
"	14 Mar 1957 - 14 Mar 1961	Elbridge Durbrow
Secretary of Defense	28 Jan 1953 - 8 Oct 1957	Charles E. Wilson
"	9 Oct 1957 - 2 Dec 1959	Neil H. McElroy
"	3 Dec 1959 - 8 Jan 1961	Thomas S. Gates, Jr.
Chairman, JCS	14 Aug 1953 - 15 Aug 1957	Admiral Arthur W. Radford, USN
"	15 Aug 1957 - 30 Sep 1960	General Nathan F. Twining, USAF
"	1 Oct 1960 - 30 Sep 1962	General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA
Chief of Staff, Army	15 Aug 1953 - 30 Jun 1965	General Matthew B. Ridgway
"	30 Jun 1955 - 30 Jun 1959	General Maxwell D. Taylor
"	1 Jul 1959 - 30 Sep 1960	General Lyman L. Lemnitzer
"	1 Oct 1960 - 30 Sep 1962	General George H. Decker
Chief of Naval Operations	16 Aug 1953 - 17 Aug 1955	Admiral Robert B. Carney
"	17 Aug 1955 - 31 Jul 1961	Admiral Arleigh A. Burke
Chief of Staff, Air Force	30 Jun 1953 - 30 Jun 1957	General Nathan F. Twining
"	1 Jul 1957 - 30 Jun 1961	General Thomas D. White
Commandant, Marine Corps	28 Jun 1952 - 31 Dec 1955	General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.
"	1 Jan 1956 - 31 Dec 1959	General Randolph McC. Pate
"	1 Jan 1960 - 31 Dec 1963	General David M. Shoup
Chief, MAAG	24 Oct 1955 - 31 Aug 1960	Lt. Gen. Samuel T. Williams, USA
"	1 Sep 1960 - 5 Mar 1962	Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, USA

GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM

Head of State/President	Mar 1949 - 26 Oct 1955	Emperor Bao Dai
"	26 Oct 1955 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem
Prime Minister	12 Jan 1954 - 16 Jun 1954	Prince Buu Loc
"	7 Jul 1954 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem
Minister of Foreign Affairs/ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs	17 Dec 1953 - 16 Jun 1954	Nguyen Quoc Dinh
"	5 Jul 1954 - May 1955	Tran Van Do
"	Jul 1955 - 1 Nov 1963	Vu Van Mau
Minister of Defense/Minister of National Defense	25 Jun 1952 - 1954(?)	Ngien Van Tri
"	5 Jul 1954 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem

1948--VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY WAS CREATED BY FRANCE. (FALL-RASKIN P. 82.)

010849 THE TERMS OF THE ELYSEE AGREEMENT CONCEDED IN PRINCIPLE THE CREATION OF A VIETNAMESE ARMY.

011049 BAO DAI HOPE FOR U.S. ARMS AID INDICATED.

060249 DAI WAS PROCLAIMED VIETNAMESE EMPEROR.

062149 U.S. BACKED THE BAO DAI REGIME.

101749 JCS SUBMITTED A PLAN FOR USING MDA SECTION 303 FUNDS IN AREAS OTHER THAN CHINA, NAMELY SOUTHEAST ASIA.

011650 PEKING RECOGNIZED THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM HEADED BY HO CHI MINH. MOSCOW FOLLOWED SUIT ON JAN 31, 1950. /J.B.

020250 FIRST REPORTS ISSUED OF THE ARRIVAL OF CHINESE EQUIPMENT FOR THE VIETMINH. THEY STARTED A GENERAL OFFENSIVE. /J.B.

020750 U.S. AND GREAT BRITAIN RECOGNIZED VIETNAM, LAOS, AND CAMBODIA AS ASSOCIATED STATES WITHIN THE FRENCH UNION AFTER THE FRENCH RATIFICATION OF THE 1949 ELYSEE AGREEMENT.

021650 FRENCH REQUESTED U.S. MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR THE INDOCHINA WAR.

021950 U.S. CONSULATE GENERAL IN SAIGON WAS RAISED TO LEGATION, AND A MINISTER WAS ACCREDITED TO VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS. /J.B.

030650 RUSK REQUESTED THAT MILITARY ATTACHES BE ASSIGNED TO SAIGON LEGATION. /1ST 288.

032550 DEFENSE MINISTER PHAN HUY QUAT OUTLINED A PLAN TO EQUIP THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WITHOUT FRENCH PARTICIPATION. (MESSAGE 204 GULLION TO ACHESON)

040550 JCS RECOMMENDED TO SEC.DEF. DIRECT MILITARY AID BE PROVIDED TO THE FRENCH IN INDOCHINA. THE RATIONALE WAS BASED ON THE DOMINO THEORY RE THE FALL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA COUNTRIES.

042450 THE U.S. ASKED FRANCE WHAT IT HOPED TO ACHIEVE WITH U.S. MILITARY AID. TWELVE NATIVE BATTALIONS WERE TO BE READY FOR MILITARY SERVICE BY 1951.

050850 AT THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE IN PARIS, MINISTER SCHUMAN ANNOUNCED THAT A VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY WOULD BE ESTABLISHED, AND SEC. OF STATE ACHESON ANNOUNCED THAT THE U.S. WOULD SEND ECONOMIC AND MILITARY AID TO THE ASSOCIATED STATES OF INDOCHINA AND FRANCE.

052550 THE U.S. FORMALLY ANNOUNCED THE INTENT TO ESTABLISH AN ECONOMIC AID MISSION TO THE ASSOCIATED STATES OF INDOCHINA. R. BLUM WAS TO BE MISSION CHIEF.



053050 A U.S. ECONOMIC MISSION ARRIVED IN SAIGON. /J.B.

060650 THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT TRIED TO OFFSET ITS FAILURE TO WIN OVER THE NATIONALISTS BY CRACKING DOWN ON THE GUERRILLAS AND STRESSING THE FORMATION OF A VIETNAMESE ARMY. BAO DAI WAS CRITICIZED FOR NOT ASSUMING ACTIVE MILITARY COMMAND OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY.

062950 MAJ.GEN. ERSKINE WAS DESIGNATED CHIEF OF THE MILITARY GROUP OF MDAP SURVIVAL MISSION TO VIETNAM.

JUL-AUG 1950 THE KOREAN WAR AND U.S. FEAR OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF A VIETMINH VICTORY FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA LED TO A READINESS IN WASHINGTON TO INCREASE AMERICAN AID TO THE FRENCH IN INDOCHINA. U.S. AID HOWEVER, DID NOT CHANGE FRENCH POLICY IN VIETNAM. U.S. OFFICIALS IN SAIGON WHO DISAGREED WITH FRENCH POLICY IN INDOCHINA WERE TRANSFERRED AT THE INSISTENCE OF THE FRENCH. /J.B.

071550 THE U.S. MISSION HEADED BY MAJ. GEN. ERSKINE ARRIVED IN VIETNAM TO PAVE THE WAY FOR MAAG. THIS MISSION WAS TO COMPLETE MAP PLANNING AND CONFER WITH THE FRENCH. NO U.S. COMBAT MEN WERE TO GO TO INDOCHINA, ONLY MILITARY SUPPLIES WOULD BE SENT TO AID THE FRENCH.

073150 FIRST ELEMENTS OF MAAG ARRIVED IN INDOCHINA.

080250 TEN OFFICERS, PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE U.S. MILITARY ADVISORY GROUP, ARRIVED IN SAIGON. SHORTLY THEREAFTER AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED WITH THE FRENCH ON OPERATIONS OF THE U.S. MISSION.

080550 THE REPORT OF MAJ. GEN. ERSKINE WAS FILED (NSC 64). IN IT HE SPOKE OF THE FEC STALEMATE, POLITICAL PROBLEM RE FRENCH-VIETNAMESE, LACK OF INTERNAL SECURITY, INCREASED MILITARY ASSISTANCE REQUIREMENT FOR THE U.S., THE COMMUNIST CHINA THREAT. FRANCE'S INABILITY TO COPE WITH VIETMINH THREAT.

080650 THE \$100-MILLION WORTH OF U.S. MILITARY SUPPLIES, WHICH ARRIVED BY AUGUST 9, WERE TO BE USED TO EQUIP THE NEW VIETNAM NATIONAL ARMY. THE FRENCH HOPED THAT THIS NATIONAL ARMY WOULD ASSUME A MAJOR PART OF FIGHTING THE VIETMINH. VIETNAM TROOPS AT THAT TIME WERE DISORGANIZED.

081050 THE FIRST SHIPMENT OF MILITARY SUPPLIES ARRIVED IN INDOCHINA FROM THE U.S.

081450 THE FRENCH CABINET DECIDED TO REDUCE THE STRENGTH OF THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS BY 9,000 MEN. THE REDUCTION, WHICH WAS MADE AGAINST MILITARY ADVICE, WAS DUE TO THE REFUSAL OF THE ASSEMBLY TO CONSIDER THE EMPLOYMENT OF NATIONAL SERVICE RECRUITS IN INDOCHINA.

081550 BILATERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN U.S.-FRANCE COVERING MDA FOR INDOCHINA WAS SIGNED IN DJAKARTA. /217155.



082450 VIETNAMESE TROOPS WERE REPORTED TO BE SLOWLY RELIEVING FRENCH TROOPS.

082840 THE VIETNAM ARMY'S 2ND ANNIVERSARY WAS OBSERVED IN ANNAM. THE LACK OF OFFICERS AND NON-COMs, THE PRESENCE OF FACTIONS AND HIGH COSTS HINDER THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY.

091450 THE 4TH SESSION TRIPARTITE MEETINGS DISCLOSED 77,000 IN ARMIES OF THE ASSOCIATED STATES, 44,000 NATIONALS IN FEC.

092450 THE FRENCH PROMISED THAN VAN HUU AID TO INCREASE THE VIETNAM ARMY.

10 50 MDAP MONTHLY REPORT FROM SAIGON DISCLOSED POOR RELATIONS BETWEEN FRENCH AND MAAG. (GULLION TO SEC.STATE)

100450 BRIG. GEN. BRINK BECAME HEAD OF THE U.S. MILITARY AID GROUP IN VIETNAM.

101050 U.S. ESTABLISHED A MILITARY MISSION IN SAIGON.

101350 THE FRENCH PLANNED TO ENLARGE THE VIETNAM ARMY. GENERAL DE LA TOUR DU MOULIN WAS APPOINTED ITS MILITARY ADVISOR.

102450 DIFFICULTIES WITH RESPECT TO ESTABLISHMENT OF VIET FORCE WERE IN RECRUITMENT, ORGANIZATION OF CADRES, FINANCING, CONSCRIPTION. /SAIGON MSG STATE 1ST NOTES

110550 AN INTER-SERVICE TRAINING COLLEGE WAS OPENED AT DAIAI. /LANCASTER.

110750 FRENCH AND VIETNAM LEADERS AGREED ON A RAPID BUILDUP OF THE VIETNAM ARMY.

110850 VIETNAM WAS EXPECTED TO SPEND 35-40 PERCENT OF ITS 1951 BUDGET ON ITS THREE-DIVISION ARMY.

112250 MINISTER LETOURNEAU TOLD THE FRENCH ASSEMBLY THAT BOTH FRENCH AND NATIONAL FORCES IN INDOCHINA WERE TO BE STRENGTHENED.

12 50 WITH THE CREATION OF THE MINISTRY FOR THE ASSOCIATED STATES, NINE SEPARATE MINISTRIES WERE DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH AND RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME ASPECT OF FRENCH ACTIVITIES IN INDOCHINA. /NAVARRE.

120450 IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT GENERAL DE LATTRE DE TASSIGNY WOULD REPLACE GENERAL CARPENTIER AND HIGH COMMISSIONER PIGNON AS THE SUPERIOR MILITARY AND CIVILIAN COMMANDER. HE TOOK OFFICE TWO DAYS LATER.

120850 AND 122350 COMPLEMENTARY AGREEMENTS TO THE 1949 ELYSEE AGREEMENT PROVIDED FOR THE FORMATION OF FOUR DIVISIONS BY THE END OF 1951. /LANCASTER.

120850 A NATIONAL VIETNAM ARMY WAS FORMALLY SET UP WITH NATIONAL STATUS FOR TROOPS BY ORDER OF BAO DAI.

121550 GENERAL ERSKINE FINISHED HIS MISSION.

122350 THE U.S. SIGNED A MUTUAL DEFENSE ASSISTANCE PENTALATERAL AGREEMENT WITH FRANCE, VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS FOR INDIRECT U.S. MILITARY AID TO FRENCH UNION FORCES IN INDOCHINA. THE AGREEMENT ON DEFENSE AND MUTUAL ASSISTANCE LAID DOWN THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH U.S. AID WOULD BE APPORTIONED AND ESTABLISHED THE PRINCIPLE THAT ALL MATERIALS PROVIDED WOULD BE HANDED OVER TO THE FRENCH COMMAND, WHILE DIRECT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ASSOCIATED STATES AND MAAG WERE TO BE EXPRESSLY PRECLUDED. /LANCASTER.

122350 MAAG INDOCHINA WAS AUTHORIZED. /217155.

1951 HO CHI MINH'S ARMY WAS THOUGHT TO CONTAIN 70,000 LIGHTLY ARMED MEN. 2 PERCENT COMMUNISTS AND THE REST WERE STRONG NATIONALISTS. /NYT

1951 THE ARMED FORCES ON THE FRENCH SIDE = 150,000. ABOUT HALF WERE NATIVES OF UNCERTAIN LOYALTY AND EFFECTIVENESS. FLEM-CWO.

JAN-MAR 51 DE LATTRE SUCCEEDED IN HALTING COMMUNIST ADVANCES. THE VIETMINH WAS FORCED TO RETURN TO GUERRILLA TACTICS. THE TROOPS AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE FRENCH NOW NUMBERED 391,000.

01 51 THE FRENCH AND VIETMINH BOTH REORGANIZED THEIR FORCES INTO DIVISIONS, SINCE THE TYPE OF COMBAT HAD ESCALATED FROM GUERRILLA WARFARE.

010851 MAAG INDOCHINA WAS OFFICIALLY ESTABLISHED WITH A STRENGTH OF 128. /217154-5.

011051 GENERAL DE LATTRE'S LEADERSHIP INCREASED THE MORALE OF BOTH THE FRENCH AND THE VIETNAMESE FORCES.

03 51 DE LATTRE LEFT FOR PARIS TO ASK FOR REINFORCEMENTS IN OFFICERS, N.C.O'S AND TECHNICIANS WHOSE SERVICES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO TRAIN THE NATIONAL ARMIES.

042551 THE FRENCH TESTED THE ABILITY OF THE VIETNAMESE POLICE TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND TO CHECK THE VIETMINH INFILTRATION IN THE VINHBAO AREA SOUTH OF HAIPHONG.

05 51 THE ADVENT OF THE MONSOON GAVE DE LATTRE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVOTE MORE OF HIS TIME AND ATTENTION TO THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL ARMIES AND HIS RESPONSIBILITIES AS HIGH COMMISSIONER.

050151 VIETNAMESE ARMY HAD 38,500 MEN.

052651 GENERAL COLLINS STATED THAT \$54-MILLION WORTH OF SUPPLIES HAD BEEN SHIPPED SINCE JUNE 1949.

061451 THE CAO DAI SECT MILITARY CHIEF COLONEL TRINH MINH TAY DEFECTED FROM FRENCH-VIETNAMESE FORCES AND LED 2,500 MEN INTO CAMBODIA.



071551 BAO DAI ORDERED TOTAL VIETNAM MOBILIZATION TO MEET A POSSIBLE THREAT BY CHINA IF A KOREA TRUCE WERE REACHED.

08 51 THE FRENCH COMMISSIONER FOR SOUTH VIETNAM, GENERAL CHANSON, WAS ASSASSINATED. /LANCASTER..

080751 PROGRESS IN THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS REPORTED. VIETNAMESE UNITS HAD PERFORMED ADEQUATELY IN ENGAGEMENTS. LACK OF LEADERSHIP, FRENCH-VIETNAMESE QUARRELS, LACK OF EQUIPMENT AND AN APATHETIC POPULACE PLAGUED THE EFFORT. /NIE 35 REPORT.

09 51 DE LATTRE WENT TO WASHINGTON TO ALLAY AMERICAN SUSPICIONS CONCERNING FRENCH INTENTIONS IN INDOCHINA AND TO ASK FOR INCREASED MILITARY SUPPLIES FOR THE NATIONAL ARMIES. HE RETURNED TO SAIGON OCT. 19. /LANCASTER.

090251 BRIG. GEN. BRINK REPORTED THAT THE FRENCH-VIETNAMESE FORCES WERE GAINING.

090751 U.S. SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH VIETNAM FOR DIRECT ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. /J.B.

092051 DE LATTRE WENT TO WASHINGTON TO PLEAD FOR MORE AMERICAN AID, IN PARTICULAR FOR NEW PLANES AND OTHER MODERN EQUIPMENT, OF WHICH MORE AND MORE BEGAN TO ARRIVE IN VIETNAM.

092351 THE U.S. PROMISED TO ACCELERATE MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID TO INDOCHINA.

10 51 CAO DAI COLONEL TRINH MINH TAY BUILT A REBEL REGIME. HE DENOUNCED BOTH FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE.

100151 A SHIPMENT OF RIFLES ENOUGH FOR 4 DIVISIONS ARRIVED IN VIETNAM FROM THE U.S.

101651 60,000 VIETNAM DRAFTEES REPORTED FOR MILITARY TRAINING AS PART OF MOBILIZATION ORDER OF BAO DAI.

110651 PROGRESS REPORT ON NSC 5612/1 (OCB) CLAIMED THAT PERSONNEL STRENGTH OF CIVIL POLICE BOARD WAS REDUCED BY 20 PERCENT BECAUSE OF MODERNIZATION EQUIPMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, AND TRANSPORTATION. /159-1.

12 51 A SPEECH BY THE RADICAL SOCIALIST DEPUTY DALADIER REVEALED A GROWING FRENCH OPPOSITION TO THE INDOCHINA WAR. DALADIER DEMANDED THAT FRANCE SEEK PEACE THROUGH THE UNITED NATIONS.

121851 THE U.S. PROPOSED AN AGREEMENT BE MADE BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE U.S. TO INSURE THE CONTINUATION OF THE ELIGIBILITY OF THE STATE OF VIETNAM AND THE PROGRAMS OF MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE NOW BEING EXTENDED. AN AGREEMENT WAS RATIFIED IN JANUARY 3, 1952.



1951 PROFITING FROM THE CHANGED CHARACTER OF THE WAR, DE LATTRE WAS ABLE DURING HIS BRIEF PROCONSULATE TO GIVE DECISIVE IMPETUS TO THE TARDY FORMATION OF A VIETNAMESE ARMY, FIRST BY PERSUADING THE VIETNAMESE ACCEPT THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL CONSCRIPTION, AND SECONDLY BY SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATING IN WASHINGTON FOR MILITARY AID TO EQUIP THE NATIONAL DIVISIONS THAT IT WAS NOW PROPOSING TO RAISE AND TRAIN.  
/LANCASTER.

EARLY 1952 A TRAINING SCHOOL FOR AIR FORCE PERSONNEL WAS OPENED AT NHA TRAN

010752 GENERAL DE LATTRE WAS ILL, GENERAL SALAN COMMANDED THE FRENCH FORCES IN HIS ABSENCE.

011152 DE LATTRE DIED. THE COMMUNISTS STARTED A NEW OFFENSIVE. WITH CHINESE EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING ARTILLERY, THEY WERE NOW ABLE TO REDUCE DE LATTRE'S GAINS AND TO ELIMINATE MANY SMALLER POSITIONS BETWEEN THE CITIES HELD BY THE FRENCH.

011152 VIETNAMESE ARMY STRENGTH WAS AT 65,000.

011152 TRIPARTITE CHIEFS OF STAFF CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON.

012852 BAO DAI PLEDGED TO ESTABLISH A 120,000-MAN VIETNAM ARMY.

020452 MINISTER LETOURNEAU CONFERRED WITH BAO DAI ON THE BUILDUP OF, AND U.S. FOR THE NATIONAL ARMY.  
LACK OF TOP OFFICERS SLOWED TRAINING. AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON APPOINTING A VIETNAMESE CHIEF OF STAFF AND FULLTIME DEFENSE MINISTER.

021152 VIETNAMESE PARATROOPERS WERE USED IN AN ATTACK ON THE TONGKIN AREA.

022252 DISSIDENT CAODAIST FORCES CLASHED WITH THE FRENCH. THEIR LEADER, COLONEL TRINH MINH TAY, WAS DENOUNCED AS A TRAITOR.

022352 FRENCH ASKED FOR MORE U.S. AID IN ARMING THE NEW DIVISIONS.

022452 GENERAL SALAN EVACUATED FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE TROOPS FROM HOA BINH AND THE WESTERN END OF THE HOA BINH-HANOI ROAD IN ORDER TO PROVIDE MORE TROOPS FOR THE TONGKIN DELTA OPERATIONS.

030852 BAO DAI APPOINTED GENERAL NGUYEN VAN HINH AS CHIEF OF STAFF.

031852 ACHESON TOLD A SENATE COMMITTEE THAT THE INDOCHINA SITUATION WAS VERY SERIOUS. HE STRESSED THE NEED FOR A LARGE AND EFFECTIVE NATIVE FORCE. LETOURNEAU FELT ACHESON'S ALARM WAS UNJUSTIFIED.

04 THRU END OF 1952 NATIVE FORCES WERE INCREASINGLY USED IN THE FIGHTING.

040152 MINISTER LETOURNEAU WAS NAMED HIGH COMMISSIONER, AND REMAINED IN THE FRENCH CABINET AS THE ASSOCIATED STATES' MINISTER. GENERAL SALAN REMAINED AS THE MILITARY COMMANDER.

040852 THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WAS ADVISED BY THE SERVICE SECRETARIES THAT A POSITIVE COURSE OF ACTION IN INDOCHINA WOULD BE TO EXPAND THE MAAG TO TRAIN AND EQUIP THE NATIONAL ARMY TO PROVIDE INTERNAL SECURITY.

041052 LETOURNEAU SAID THAT FRANCE WAS TO MAINTAIN ITS TROOPS UNTIL NATIVE TROOPS WERE READY.

041652 NATIVE OFFICERS UNDER GENERAL NGUYEN VAN HINH TOOK OVER THE VIETNAM ARMY GENERAL STAFF.

041952 GENERAL SALAN PRAISED NATIVE TROOPS IN THE CLEAN UP DRIVE OF THE TONGKIN DELTA.

042752 THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS TO FORM A NATIVE REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM AS OUTLINED BY ITS CHIEF OF STAFF.

05 52 VIETNAMESE GENERAL STAFF CAME INTO EXISTENCE.

051852 EXPANSION OF NATIVE FORCES BROUGHT TOTAL FRENCH AND INDOCHINESE FORCES TO 400,000. 50,000 REGULAR GROUND TROOPS HAD BEEN ADDED SINCE JUNE 19

052452 VIETNAM PLANNED TO CALL 20-28 YEAR OLDS WITH GRADE SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR SERVICE AS OFFICERS. THE GENERAL MOBILIZATION WAS DROPPED.

052852 AT THE TRIPARTITE MEETINGS IN PARIS IT WAS STATED THAT MORE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM U.S. WAS NEEDED TO PUT 200,000 TROOPS IN ARMIES OF THE ASSOCIATED STATES.

06 52 FOUR REGIONAL STAFFS OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WERE CREATED.

06 52 LETOURNEAU WENT TO WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS INCREASES IN U.S. AID. THESE DISCUSSIONS RESULTED IN AN AGREEMENT THAT U.S. MILITARY AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE INCREASED TO COVER 40 PERCENT OF FRENCH EXPENSES IN INDOCHINA. A FINAL COMMUNIQUE ISSUED ON JUNE 18 STATED THAT THE STRUGGLE IN WHICH THE FORCES OF THE FRENCH UNION AND THE ASSOCIATED STATES WERE ENGAGED, AGAINST THE FORCES OF COMMUNIST AGGRESSION IN INDOCHINA, WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF WORLD WIDE RESISTANCE BY THE FREE NATIONS TO COMMUNIST ATTEMPTS AT CONQUEST AND SUBVERSION. /DEPT. STATE.

060352 UNDER THE HIGH COMMISSIONER LETOURNEAU, THE FRENCH PROVOKED MODERATE NATIONALISTS BY NAMING NGUYEN VAN TAM AS PREMIER OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. NGUYEN VAN TAM, FATHER OF NGUYEN VAN HINH WHO WAS LATER MADE CHIEF OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY, WAS HATED FOR THE PART HE HAD PLAYED EARLIER IN THE CRUEL SUPPRESSION OF VIETNAMESE RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS.

060752 FRENCH-VIETNAM COMMANDOS RAIDED THE ANNAM COAST.

060952 FRANCE HOPED TO SHIFT THE WAR BURDEN TO THE VIETNAM FORCES.



061552 U.S. MINISTER HEATH AND FRENCH MINISTER LETOURNEAU CONFERRED IN WASHINGTON. LETOURNEAU PRESSED FOR AID TO EXPAND THE NATIVE FORCES AND URGED FOR COMMON U.S.-BRITISH-FRENCH POLICY TO ASSURE VIETNAM OF WESTERN SUPPORT.

062452 IN THE DEBATE OVER NSC 124, THE TRAINING OF LOCAL ARMIES WAS AN ALTERNATIVE, PUT FORTH BY SECRETARY KIMBALL FOR SUCCESSFULLY COUNTERING RUSSIA AT THE LOCAL WAR LEVEL.

062552 NGUYEN VAN TAM TOOK OFFICE AS PREMIER, APPOINTED BY BAO DAI, WHO WAS OF STATE.

07 52 U.S. LEGATION IN SAIGON WAS RAISED TO EMBASSY STATUS. U.S. AMBASSADOR PRESENTED CREDENTIALS TO BAO DAI. A VIETNAMESE EMBASSY WAS ESTABLISHED IN WASHINGTON D.C. /J.B.

071252 LETOURNEAU REVEALED THAT THE VIETNAM NATIONAL ARMY TOTALED 68,000 MEN.

073052 FRANCE WARNED THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE TO ABANDON THE WAR IF THE U.S. DID NOT INCREASE FUNDS FOR FRENCH DEFENSE CONTRACTS. AID TO INDOCHINA FOR 1953 WAS SET AT \$350-MILLION. FRENCH HINTED FOR U.S. RELIEF FORCES.

080152 VIETNAM'S PREMIER PLEDGED TWO MORE NATIVE DIVISIONS BY THE YEAR'S END. PLANNED A NEW TAX TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE ARMY.

092152 THE VIETMINH STAGED AN ATTACK NEAR SAIGON.

101252 THE 200TH U.S. SHIP CARRYING MILITARY AID ARRIVED IN SAIGON. /J.B.

53 A NAVAL TRAINING SCHOOL WAS ESTABLISHED AT NHA TRANG.

012053 GENERAL O'DANIEL WENT TO VIETNAM TO REVIEW LETOURNEAU'S OPERATION PLANS.

02 53 AD HOC COMMITTEE TO THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ISA RECOMMENDED AGAINST DIRECT AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE VIETNAMESE TRAINING PROGRAM FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. /JCS HIST.

020453 MINISTER LETOURNEAU REPORTED ON A NEW PLAN TO SPEED UP VIETNAMESE TROOP TRAINING.

021653 EX-PREMIER REYNAUD FELT INCREASING THE VIETNAM ARMY WAS THE ONLY SOLUTION TO THE MILITARY STALEMATE. MARSHALL JUIN CONCURRED.

022253 THE FRENCH-VIETNAMESE HIGH MILITARY COMMISSION CONSIDERED DOUBLING THE VIETNAM ARMY. IT APPEARED THAT THE FRENCH HAD ACCEPTED BAO DAI'S ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GEN. NGUYEN VAN HINH'S PLAN TO INCREASE THE REGULAR ARMY. FINANCING DIFFICULTIES WERE ANTICIPATED.



022353 TALKS TOOK PLACE AT DALAT, VIETNAM, BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE THE HIGH MILITARY COMMAND. THEY DECIDED TO DOUBLE THE PROJECTED SIZE OF THE VNA BY ADDING 60 MORE LIGHT BATTALIONS. MEMBERS PRESENT WERE BAO DAI (CHIEF-OF-STATE), NGUYEN VAN TAM (PREMIER), NGUYEN VAN HINH (CHIEF OF STAFF), LETOURNEAU, AND SALAN. THE DECISION WAS A MOVE TO END THE MILITARY STALEMATE. THE REGULAR ARMY = 160,000. 30,000 WOULD BE ADDED BY THE END OF 1953 IN 20 BATTALIONS.

022453 C.J. SULZBERGER REPORTED PREMIER MAYER AS SAYING THAT FRANCE COULD NOT FULFILL ANY MORE EUROPEAN COMMITMENTS UNLESS THE NATO ALLIES INCREASED THEIR AID. A COMMITTEE AGREED TO INCREASE VNA BATTALIONS FROM 30 TO THE U.S. OFFERED \$42 MILLION IN AID CONDITIONAL ON THE PLACEMENT OF OBSERVERS WITH THE TROOPS. /NYT 022443.

022453 A JOINT FRENCH-VIETNAMESE HIGH MILITARY COMMITTEE DECIDED TO RAISE 71 BATTALIONS.

022553 VIETNAM WAS GIVEN MORE FREEDOM IN DEVELOPING ITS NATIONAL ARMY APART FROM FRENCH CONTROL. 54 BATTALIONS WERE TO BE FORMED IN 1953, TO CONTROL AREAS LESS UNDER REBEL CONTROL.

SPRING 1953 EXPEDITIONARY CORPS = LAND FORCES OF 175,000 REGULAR TROOPS, INCLUDING 54,000 FRENCH, 30,000 NORTH AFRICAN, 18,000 AFRICAN, 20,000 LEGIONARIES, 53,000 LOCALLY RAISED TROOPS, AND 55,000 AUXILIARY TROOPS, A NAVAL CONTINGENT OF 5,000, AIR FORCE CONTINGENT OF 10,000. IN THE ARMIES OF THE ASSOCIATED STATES WERE 150,000 REGULAR AND 50,000 AUXILIARY TROOPS IN VIETNAM, 15,000 IN LAOS, 10,000 IN CAMBODIA. /NAVARRE.

03 53 THE FRANCO-VIETNAMESE HIGH MILITARY COUNCIL APPROVED A NEW PROGRAM CALLING FOR AN INCREASE IN VIETNAMESE STRENGTH DURING 1953 OF 40,000 MEN IN 54 "COLONIAL" BATTALIONS.

031453 THE FRENCH CABINET CONSIDERED A PLAN THAT WOULD LESSEN ITS INDOCHINA COMMITMENTS BY TRAINING MORE VIETNAMESE.

032053 ON A VISIT TO INDOCHINA, U.S. GEN. MARK CLARK PRAISED FRENCH TACTICS AND TRAINING METHODS, SAW NO NEED FOR U.S. MILITARY INSTRUCTORS, AND SAID THE U.S. WOULD NOT FOIST ITS METHODS ON THE FRENCH.

032353 GEN. MARK CLARK STRESSED THE NEED TO EXPAND THE VIETNAM ARMY, AND WAS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THE LOCAL MILITIA, OFFICER CADRES, AND TROOP MOBILITY.

032553 H.W. BALDWIN WAS OPTIMISTIC RE FRENCH INVESTMENT AND VIETNAM ARMY STRENGTH.

042253 AT THE BIPARTITE (US-FRANCE) MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON, DULLES WAS VERY ANXIOUS FOR FRENCH TO ADOPT THE SUCCESSFUL U.S.-KOREAN INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS FOR USE IN INDOCHINA. /JCS HIST.

042253 THE PARIS GOVERNMENT DECREED THAT FRANCE WOULD BE REPRESENTED IN INDOCHINA BY A HIGH COMMISSION CONSISTING OF A COMMISSIONER GENERAL IN SAIGON AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS IN EACH OF THE ASSOCIATED STATES.

042653 G. GAUTIER WAS APPOINTED HIGH COMMISSIONER IN VIETNAM.

05 53 ALTOGETHER VIETMINH INSURGENTS STRENGTH = 280,000 INCLUDING REGULARS, REGIONAL TROOPS, MILITIAMEN. THE MAIN STRIKING FORCE = 70,000 MEN IN FIVE ELITE DIVISIONS.

050853 GEN. HENRI NAVARRE WAS APPOINTED BY PREMIER MAYER AS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE FRENCH UNION FORCES IN INDOCHINA, SUCCEEDING GEN. SALAN. HE TOOK OFFICE MAY 20.

060453 VIA DEVELOPMENT PROMISED BY FRENCH IN 1949 HAD BEEN RETARDED BY A SHORTAGE OF OFFICERS, BY FRENCH LACK OF FAITH IN THE VIETNAMESE AND FRENCH FISCAL PROBLEMS. /NIE 91

07 53 THROUGHOUT THE MONTH NAVARRE WAS IN PARIS ATTENDING MEETINGS CONCERNING FRENCH ACTIVITIES IN INDOCHINA. THE SCALE OF HIS DEMANDS WERE OBJECTED TO BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF BECAUSE FULFILLING THEM WOULD HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE GENERAL MILITARY SITUATION IN EUROPE AND NORTH AFRICA. IT WAS SUGGESTED TO TRY TO GET AN INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEE OF LAOTIAN TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY TO LESSEN THE FRENCH RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY. /LANCASTER.

070353 FRENCH GOVERNMENT HANDED A NOTE TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OF VIETNAM, CAMBODIA IN WHICH IT MADE A SOLEMN DECLARATION OF ITS READINESS TO COMPLETE THE INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY OF THE ASSOCIATED STATES BY TRANSFERRING ALL FUNCTIONS WHICH REMAINED UNDER FRENCH CONTROL, AND INVITED THE GOVERNMENTS TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE FRENCH THE SETTLEMENT OF OUTSTANDING CLAIMS IN THE ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL, JUDICIAL, MILITARY, AND POLITICAL SPHERES. /LANCASTER.

070353 M. DEJEAN WAS APPOINTED COMMISSIONER GENERAL TO THE ASSOCIATED STATES.

070953 U.S. GEN. O'DANIEL ENDED A 3-WEEK SURVEY. HE FAVORED AN INCREASE IN MILITARY AID AND WAS CONFIDENT OF FRENCH VICTORY ONCE THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS FULLY ORGANIZED.

071253 IN FRANCO-U.S. BILATERAL TALKS, THE NAVARRE PLAN WAS DEFINED, AS CALLING FOR A STRUCTURAL REORGANIZATION TO CREATE UNITS BETTER ADAPTED FOR WAR CONDITIONS AND OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS. /1ST NOTES 67.

071653 JAMES RESTON, NYT, LINKED THE LAG IN NATIVE TROOP DEVELOPMENT TO NON-ENTHUSIASM FOR BAO DAI'S REGIME.

072753 AFTER THE KOREAN ARMISTICE, U.S. AID FOR THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM GREW IN VOLUME.



090653 NON-COMMUNIST NATIONALISTS HELD A CONFERENCE IN SAIGON. THEY DENOUNCED FRENCH COLONIALISM, ATTACKED PREMIER TAM AND DEMANDED AN ELECTED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

092353 THE FRENCH FORMALLY AGREED TO ALLOWING U.S. PERSONNEL TO EXAMINE THE TO WHICH U.S. AID WAS BEING PUT.

10 53 IT WAS HOPED THAT 30,000 MEN WOULD BE MOBILIZED FOR THE VIETNAM ARMY BEFORE DECEMBER.

101453 A VIETNAM NATIONAL CONGRESS OF 200 CONVENED IN SAIGON. RATHER THAN CHOOSE POTENTIAL DELEGATES FOR A MEETING WITH FRANCE THEY PASSED A RESOLUTION DECLARING AN INDEPENDENT VIETNAM WAS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FRENCH UNION.

101553 GENERAL NAVARRE LAUNCHED THE HEAVIEST OFFENSIVE OPERATION IN TWO YEARS.

11 53 GENERALS O'DANIEL AND BONSAL CONDUCTED A SECOND SURVEY IN VIETNAM.  
/REPORT FILED 12-19-53.

11 53 GENERAL O'DANIEL REPORTED ON RECOMMENDATIONS HE MADE TO THE FRENCH WHICH ALL FELL SHORT OF INTRODUCTION OF LARGE AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN PLANNING OF OPERATIONS AND TRAINING OF VIETNAMESE FORCES. /JCS HIST.

11 53 BRIG. GEN. PAUL W. CARMWAY REPORTED THAT THERE WAS LITTLE SEMBLANCE OF A NATIONAL ARMY.

111953 THE 2ND REPORT OF GENERAL O'DANIEL STATED THAT THE FRENCH POSSESSED THE MILITARY INITIATIVE. INDIGENOUS ARMY DEVELOPMENT HAD OCCURRED AS PLANNED. VIETNAMESE BATTALIONS SHOULD BE USED ONLY WITH REGULAR FORCES AND NOT IN SEPARATE BATTALIONS. REORGANIZATION OF FRENCH FORCES INTO MOBILE GROUPS AND DIVISIONS HAD BEEN SIGNIFICANT. NATIONAL ARMY TRAINING HAD BEEN UNSATISFACTORY. CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA HAD KEPT ABREAST OF FRENCH PLANS.

112953 HO CHI MINH ISSUED A CALL FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN A STOCKHOLM NEWSPAPER.

121753 NGUYEN VAN TAM LEFT HIS OFFICE AS PREMIER.

121853 BAO DAI ASKED PRINCE BUU LOC TO TAKE THE PREMIERSHIP OF VIETNAM. HE ENTERED OFFICE JAN. 16, 1954 AND SERVED UNTIL JUNE 16, 1954.

1953 A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF U.S. AID IN 1953 WAS TO EQUIP THE GROWING VIETNAMESE ARMY, WHICH TOTALED 155,000 AT THE END OF 1952, AND WAS EXPANDED BY 40,000 BY THE END OF 1953, TO REACH A TOTAL STRENGTH OF 300,000 BY THE END OF 1954. FRANCE PLANNED TO INCREASE FEC STRENGTH IN INDOCHINA TO 250,000 BY THE END OF 1953. /AM

54 THERE WERE 25 AMERICANS ATTACHED TO STEM AS ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANTS IN INDOCHINA. STEM HAD 100 NATIVE EMPLOYEES



01 54 FEC IN INDOCHINA = 240,000. VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY = 211,000.  
LAOTIAN ARMY = 21,000. CAMBODIAN ARMY = 16,000. VIETMINH =  
115,000. REGULARS PLUS 185,000 MILITIAMEN + GUERRILLAS.

011654 THE CABINET OF PRINCE BUU LOC WAS INVESTED.

012654 AT THE BIG FOUR CONFERENCE IN BERLIN, BIDAULT SPECIFIED THAT A  
CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINA BE HELD. THE MAIN RESULT OF THE BERLIN  
CONFERENCE WAS THE SETTING OF APRIL 26 FOR A MEETING AT GENEVA ON  
INDOCHINA. /FLEM-CWO.

012954 SEC.DEF. MEMO TO SEC. AF. DIRECTED 200 AIR FORCE PERSONNEL TO INDOCHINA  
TDY TO JUNE 15, 1954.

012954 MAJOR GENERAL ERSKINE, CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDENT'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON INDOCHINA, THOUGHT MAAG INDOCHINA SHOULD BE RAISED TO MISSION  
LEVEL TO HELP WITH TRAINING.

02 54 THE NEW FIRST VIETNAMESE DIVISION WHICH HAD BEEN CREATED ACCORDING TO  
THE NAVARRE PLAN AND LEFT IN A STATIC POSITION, TURNED AGAINST  
BAO DAI AND THE FRENCH. /FLEM-CWO.

02 54 PRESIDENT RHEE OF KOREA OFFERED TO SEND A ROK DIVISION TO INDOCHINA.  
WERE OPPOSED. /314-1

020154 PRESIDENT EISENHOWER, THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, THE JOINT CHIEFS  
OF STAFF, OTHER AGENCIES OF THE GOVERNMENT AND A SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF W. BEDELL SMITH HAD STUDIED THE INDOCHINA  
SITUATION IN TERMS OF WHAT COURSE THE U.S. SHOULD FOLLOW. THEY  
HAD CONSIDERED THE USE OF U.S. GROUND AIR AND NAVAL FORCES IN  
INDOCHINA AND ALSO REVIEWED THE OLD THEORY THAT INDOCHINA WAS THE  
KEY TO SOUTHEAST ASIA, WEIGHED ALTERNATIVE PLANS LIKE THE  
STRENGTHENING OF THAILAND. /FLEM-CWO.

020554 GEN. O'DANIEL'S REPORT ON HIS 3RD VISIT TO VIETNAM RECOMMENDED 1)  
ORGANIZATION OF A SMALL STAFF TO GO QUICKLY TO VIETNAM WITH DETAILED  
OPERATIONS AND TRAINING PLANS 2) TWO OFFICERS TO BE ATTACHED TO  
VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT 3) MORE FUNDS FOR STEM 4) TRAINING COMMAND  
FOR VIETNAMESE NAVAL AND AIR FORCES.

020954 WAR MINISTER RENE PLEVEN TOURED VIETNAM. /LANCASTER.

MID FEB. 1954 GENERALS FAY AND BLANCK, CHIEFS OF STAFF OF AIR FORCE AND ARMY  
RESPECTIVELY, AND SECRETARY OF WAR PIERRE DE CHEVIGNE TOURED VIETNAM  
FOR FRANCE. /LANCASTER.

MAR-APR 54 THE BATTLE OF DIEN BIEN PHU RAGED.

030354 PRINCE BUU LOC ARRIVED IN PARIS WITH A DELEGATE TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT  
OF VIETNAM CLAIMS ON THE BASIS OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S SOLEMN  
ATION OF JULY 3, 1953. THE FRENCH INSISTED ON A COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE  
THE TOTAL INDEPENDENCE AND A COMMITTEE TO DEFINE THE NATURE OF VIETNAM'S  
ASSOCIATION TO FRANCE. THIS EFFECTIVELY TIED UP AND PUT OFF ACTIONS  
UNTIL THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OPENED. (SEE 042854) /LANCASTER.

032054 ALSOP REPORTED THAT GENERAL ELY SAID IN WASHINGTON THAT FRANCE COULD NOT WIN WITH THE MEANS AT HAND AND MUST THEREFORE SEEK A NEGOTIATED PEACE BUT THE U.S. COULD NOT ACCEPT THIS BECAUSE THERE WAS NO FIGHTING IN INDOCHINA, AS IN KOREA. THE ENEMY WAS EVERYWHERE, SO IF THE FRENCH WITHDREW, ANY NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT MUST LEAD RAPIDLY TO TOTAL COMMUNIST CONTROL. /FLEM-CWO.

032254 ADMIRAL ARTHUR RADFORD, CHAIRMAN OF JCS, DECLARED THAT THE FRENCH WERE GOING TO WIN THIS WAR. /FLEM-CWO.

032454 THE PRESIDENT OF U.S. PRAISED THE HEROISM OF THE FRENCH FORCES AND DECLARED THAT COMMUNIST AGGRESSION WAS BEING FOUGHT IN INDOCHINA. COMMUNIST AGGRESSION WAS THE STOCK PHRASE USED IN WASHINGTON TO THE INDOCHINA WAR. /FLEM-CWO.

032954 DULLES MADE A SPEECH APPROVED BY THE PRESIDENT IN ADVANCE, DECLARING THAT COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF INDOCHINA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA BY WHATEVER WOULD BE A GRAVE THREAT TO THE FREE COMMUNITY AND SHOULD NOT BE PASSIVELY ACCEPTED. IN THESE WORDS HE RULED OUT EVEN A FREE ELECTION AS A MEANS OF LEGITIMIZING THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT OF HO CHI MINH IN INDOCHINA, STRESSING INSTEAD THE RICHES OF THE AREA AND ITS GREAT STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE. REACTION IN SAIGON WAS U.S. UNPOPULAR. /FLEM-CWO  
CHECK FLEM-CWO PG 689 NOTE 99

04 54 GENERAL O'DRAIEL WAS ASSIGNED PERMANENTLY TO INDOCHINA. /JCS HIST.

040354 IN WASHINGTON A SECRET CONFERENCE WAS HELD IN WHICH DULLES AND RADFORD TRIED TO PERSUADE EIGHT LEADERS OF CONGRESS TO AGREE TO SUPPORT A CONGRESSIONAL RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING OUR ENTRY INTO THE INDOCHINA WAR. THE MEETING WAS CALLED BY AUTHORITY OF THE PRESIDENT. THE LEGISLATORS PRESENT WERE SEN. WILLIAM F. KNOWLAND, SEN. EUGENE MILLIMAN, SEN. LYNDON JOHNSON, SEN. RICHARD B. RUSSELL, SEN. EARL C. CLEMENTS, HOUSE SPEAKER JOSEPH MARTIN, REP. JOHN H. MC CORMACK, AND REP. J. PERCY PRIEST. RADFORD WANTED TO SEND 200 PLANES FROM THE CARRIERS ESSEX AND WHICH HE HAD READY IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, PLUS OTHER PLANES FROM THE PHILIPPINES, TO SAVE DIEN BIEN PHU. QUESTIONING BROUGHT OUT THAT NONE OF THE OTHER THREE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF APPROVED OF THE IDEA. RADFORD SAID THIS WAS BECAUSE HE HAD SPENT MORE TIME IN THE FAR EAST THAN ANY OF THEM AND SO HE UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION BETTER. /FLEM-CWO.

040754 PRES. EISENHOWER USED THE ROW OF DOMINIES THEORY AT A PRESS CONFERENCE. /GETTLEMAN P. 100

041354 IN A MEMO FROM JCS TO SEC. DEF. IT WAS STATED THAT THE ARMY WAS CURRENTLY CAPABLE OF ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING INTERNAL SECURITY AGAINST DISSIDENTS AND BANDITS BUT NOT AGAINST VIETMINH ALL OUT AGGRESSION UNDER DRV DIRECTION.

041554 ADMIRAL RADFORD, CHAIRMAN OF JCS SAID IN A SPEECH THAT INDOCHINA'S LOSS WOULD BE THE PRELUDE TO THE LOSS OF ALL SOUTHEAST ASIA AND A THREAT TO A FAR WIDER AREA. /GETTLEMAN P.100



- 041654 VICE PRESIDENT NIXON IN AN ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS RULED OUT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS TO DIVIDE THE TERRITORY. HE SAID, "IT IS HOPED THAT THE U.S. WILL NOT HAVE TO SEND TROOPS THERE, BUT IF THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT AVOID IT, THE ADMINISTRATION MUST FACE UP TO THE SITUATION AND DISPATCH FORCES." /GETTLEMEN
- 042654 PUBLIC REACTION WAS SO ADVERSE TO NIXON'S STATEMENT THAT DULLES SAID THAT THE SENDING OF TROOPS WAS UNLIKELY. /FLEM-CWO.
- 042854 A JOINT FRANCO-VIETNAMESE DECLARATION STATED THAT VIETNAM, (THE INDEPENDENCE OF WHICH THE FRENCH HAD PROCLAIMED HALF A DOZEN TIMES), WAS FULLY INDEPENDENT.
- 05 54 THE QUAI D'ORSAY AT THE INSISTENCE OF THE U.S. DEPT. OF STATE SENT ITS EMISSARIES TO BAO DAI AT CANES TO RIG THE APPOINTMENT OF DIEM ARRIVED IN SAIGON 1954. (WID 41-57) EARLY IN MAY DIEM HAD TROUBLE WITH BAO DAI. NEITHER FRENCH NOR BAO DAI HAD ANY LIKING FOR DIEM. DULLES AND CARDINAL SPELLMAN WERE IN FAVOR OF A GOVERNMENT HEADED BY DIEM ALTHOUGH THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT DULLES WAS NOT OVERENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT DIEM. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT DID NOT OPPOSE IT. SOME FRENCH LEADERS ENCOURAGED IT --FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER LETOURNEAU AND FREDERIC-DUPOINT, WHO FOR A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE FALL OF THE LANIEL HAD SERVED AS MINISTER FOR THE ASSOCIATED STATES OF INDOCHINA. /J.B.
- 050354 MAJOR GENERAL THOMAS J.H. TRAFIELL DISAGREED IN NEARLY ALL RESPECTS WITH GENERAL O'DANIEL ON ASSESSMENT OF THE INDOCHINA WAR. HE STRESSED THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE WAR AND SAID THAT A STRICTLY MILITARY SOLUTION WAS NOT POSSIBLE.
- 050654 DIEN BIEN PHU FELL.
- 050754 AFTER DIEN BIEN PHU FELL, SECRETARY DULLES SAID THAT THE PRESENT CONDITIONS IN INDOCHINA DID NOT PROVIDE A SUITABLE BASIS FOR THE U.S. TO PARTICIPATE WITH ITS ARMED FORCES. HE DECLARED HOWEVER, THAT IF AN ARMISTICE OR CEASEFIRE CONCLUDED AT GENEVA PROVIDED A ROAD TO A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER AND FURTHER AGGRESSION, OR IF HOSTILITIES CONTINUED, THEN THE NEED WOULD BE EVEN MORE URGENT TO CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR UNITED ACTION IN DEFENSE OF THE AREA. THE SECRETARY THEN POINTED OUT THAT PRESIDENT EISENHOWER HAD REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THAT U.S. WOULD NOT TAKE MILITARY ACTION IN INDOCHINA WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF CONGRESS AND THAT HE WOULD NOT SEEK SUCH SUPPORT UNLESS THERE WAS ADEQUATE COLLECTIVE EFFORT BASED ON GENUINE MUTUALITY OF PURPOSE IN DEFENDING VITAL INTERESTS.
- 050854 GENEVA CONFERENCE ON INDOCHINA. (MAY 8 - JULY 21)
- 051254 REPORTS OF A PRESS CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON AT WHICH DULLES WAS REPORTED TO HAVE DECLARED THAT THE RETENTION OF INDOCHINA WAS NOT ESSENTIAL TO THE DEFENSE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AFFECTED FRENCH MORALE ADVERSELY AT GENEVA.



051554 GEN. ELY AGREED TO ALLOWING U.S. TO TRAIN VIETNAMESE AND TO U.S. ADVISORS IN VIETNAMESE UNITS. HE DID NOT GIVE ASSENT TO FORMATION OF VIETNAM INTO LIGHT DIVISIONS PER GENERAL O'DANIEL'S REQUEST. /JCS HIST.

051854 GENERALS ELY, SALAN, AND PELISSIER ARRIVED IN SAIGON. /LANCASTER.

0518+20 1954 BAO DAI SOUGHT SUPPORT FROM U.S. FOR VNA. THIS WAS VIEWED AS AN ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN WILLINGNESS OF U.S. TO REPLACE FRENCH.

052054 JCS WERE CONVINCED THAT U.S. INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA SHOULD BE PREDICATED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ARMIES AT THE BEST GUARANTEE OF A MILITARY VICTORY. /JCS HIST.

052454 GENERAL O'DANIEL PRESENTED A PLAN TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILSON TO CREATE 2 VIETNAMESE DIVISIONS IN THE NORTH AND 9 IN THE SOUTH WITH FRENCH COMMAND BUT U.S. COUNTERPART STAFF REPRESENTATION. THE JCS FELT THIS WAS AN UNWORKABLE ARRANGEMENT WITHOUT PRIOR AGREEMENT AT GOVT. LEVEL. /JCS HIST.

052654 MEMO FROM JCS TO SEC. DEF. STATED 2250 U.S. PERSONNEL OVER THE 350 WERE MAAG REQUIRED TO TRAIN THE ASSOCIATED STATES FORCES.

06 54 THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO SET UP A COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE NORTH WHICH WAS INVESTED WITH THE POWERS HITHERTO EXERCISED BY THE GOVERNOR, AND WAS INSTRUCTED TO PREPARE THE DEFENSE OF HANOI IN THE EVENT OF A FRENCH WITHDRAWAL. THESE ORDERS WERE LATER AMENDED WITH THE RESULT THAT THE COMMITTEE DIRECTED ITS ACTIVITIES TOWARD THE ORGANIZATION OF RECEPTION CENTERS FOR THE REFUGEES WHO WERE LATER TRANSFERRED SOUTH.

JUNE-JULY 1954 THE 11TH AND 14TH FRENCH INFANTRY DIVISIONS WERE MOVED TO TUNISIA WITH MDAP EQUIPMENT WITHOUT U.S. BUT WITH SACFOR APPROVAL.

06 54 PRESIDENT RHEE OF KOREA'S OFFER TO SEND A ROK ARMY CORPS TO INDOCHINA WAS KEPT UNDER CONSIDERATION. /314-1.

06 54 VIETNAM ARMY WAS AT ITS PEAK STRENGTH OF 219,000. /WID 20-56.

060154 LANDSDALE ARRIVED IN SAIGON TO HEAD SAIGON MILITARY MISSION. /SEM REPT.

060354 ADMIRAL RADFORD SUGGESTED TO GENERAL VALLUY, HEAD OF THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION, THE USE OF SOUTH KOREAN TROOPS IN INDOCHINA WAR. ACCORDING TO VALLUY THE FRENCH WERE READY TO TURN OVER TO THE U.S. 2 LARGE TRAINING CAMPS.

060354 GENERAL PAUL ELY WAS APPOINTED FRENCH HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR INDOCHINA.

060454 FRANCE INITIALED TREATIES WHICH GAVE THE FRENCH-RECOGNIZED VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE. VIETNAM AGREED TO A FREE ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCE WITHIN THE FRENCH UNION. /NYT

060454 IN PARIS, FRENCH PREMIER LAMIEL AND VIETNAMESE PREMIER BUU LOC INITIALED TWO TREATIES, A TREATY OF INDEPENDENCE OF VIETNAM AND A TREATY OF ASSOCIATION PROVIDING FOR COOPERATION THROUGH A HIGH COUNCIL. (DETAILS ON FUTURE COLLABORATION, ESPECIALLY MILITARY AND ECONOMIC, WERE TO BE WORKED OUT IN SEPARATE CONVENTIONS WHICH WERE NEVER CONCLUDED.)

060554 GEN. PAUL HENRI ELY WAS APPOINTED TO REPLACE DEJEAN AS COMMISSIONER GENERAL FOR THE ASSOCIATED STATES AND REPLACING NAVARRE AS COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF THE FRENCH UNION FORCES IN INDOCHINA.

060654 THE FRENCH AGREED TO THE APPOINTMENT OF NGO DINH DIEM AS PREMIER OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

060854 GENERAL NAVARRE TURNED OVER HIS COMMAND TO GENERAL PAUL ELY.

060954 GENERAL ELY, THRU O'DANIEL, REQUESTED THAT THE U.S. ASSUME ORGANIZATIONAL AND SUPERVISORIAL DUTIES IN TRAINING VIETNAMESE DIVISIONS. /JCS HIST.

0609-26 1954 ELY'S REQUEST GENERATED A CRISIS IN WASHINGTON. SUCH A TRAINING MISSION WAS FELT BY DULLES TO BE CONTRARY TO U.S. INTERESTS SINCE THE WAR WAS DEGENERATING SO QUICKLY. GENERAL O'DANIEL WAS REFUSED PERMISSION TO GO AHEAD WITH THE TRAINING. /JCS HIST.

062554 DOD REQUESTED CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON TONNAGE AND TYPES OF EQUIPMENT IN INDOCHINA. REPLY RECEIVED FROM CHIEF MAAG ON JULY 3, AND 7. /309-1

062954 THE FRENCH BEGAN TO EVACUATE THE SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE RED RIVER DELTA.

JUL-DEC 1954 VIETMINH ADDED 5 NEW DIVISIONS TO THEIR FORCES. /JCS HIST.

THE GENEVA CONFERENCE HAD BEEN A DISASTER FOR SECRETARY DULLES. AFTER THE TWO WEEK RECESS IN THE MIDDLE OF IT HE ANNOUNCED NEITHER HE NOR GENERAL WALTER REDELL SMITH WOULD RETURN. HOWEVER, AFTER AN URGENT CALL FROM MENDES-FRANCE, DULLES FLEW TO PARIS ON JULY 12, AND SMITH RETURNED TO GENEVA. THE INITIATIVE WAS EITHER IN THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNIST POWERS ON THE ONE SIDE AND EDEN AND MENDES-FRANCE ON THE OTHER. AT THE END DULLES ANNOUNCED THAT THE U.S. WOULD NOT SIGN PACTS AND PRESIDENT EISENHOWER SAID ON JULY 21 THAT THE U.S. WOULD NEITHER ACCEPT PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE AGREEMENTS NOR ATTEMPT OVERTURN THEM BY FORCE. THIS WAS DUBBED A POLICY OF INNOCENCE BY DISASSOCIATION. /FLEM-CWO

07 54 U.S. AND GREAT BRITAIN MET TO DISCUSS THE COLLECTIVE DEFENSE OF SOUTHEAST ASIA.

07 54 GENERAL O'DANIEL RECOMMENDED TO JCS AN EXPANDED MAAG IN INDOCHINA TO PROVIDE AN ORGANIZATION WITH SUFFICIENT PERSONNEL TO PROVIDE A REALISTIC TRAINING PROGRAM. EXPANSION HAD TO TAKE PLACE BEFORE THE AUGUST 11, DEADLINE AS ESTABLISHED IN THE GENEVA AGREEMENT. THE STATE DEPT. CONCURRED. /JCS HIST.

070154 MAJOR LUCIEN CONIEN ARRIVED IN SAIGON AS SECOND MEMBER OF SMM. /SMM REPT.



070354 DOD INFORMED DEPT. OF STATE CONCERNING ACTIONS IT HAD TAKEN TO RECOVER MDAP EQUIPMENT IN INDOCHINA. STATE COUNTERED WITH AN INQUIRY TO BE DIRECTED TO CHIEF MAAG AS TO WHAT FRENCH WERE DOING TO RECOVER MDAP EQUIPMENT. CHIEF MAAG REPLIED ON JULY 3 (AND 7).

070354 AND 070754 CINCPAC ASSIGNED CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECOVERY AND/OR DESTRUCTION OF U.S. MDAP MATERIAL IN INDOCHINA.

070754 NGO DINH DIEM ARRIVED IN VIETNAM /SM REPT.

070754 HEAD OF STATE AND FORMER EMPEROR BAO DAI APPOINTED NGO DINH DIEM PREMIER OF VIETNAM.

070954 DOD REQUESTED STATE TO USE DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS TO ENSURE FRENCH COMPLY WITH CHIEF MAAG REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON FRENCH INTENTIONS RE MDAP EQUIPMENT. /309-1

071254 CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA SUBMITTED PROGRESS REPORT ON SAFEGUARDING MDAP EQUIPMENT. IT'S SUCCESS WAS DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL TO AMOUNT OF FRENCH ADVANCE INFORMATION. /309-1

071654 SECRETARY OF STATE SENT MESSAGE TO SMITH AT GENEVA ADVISING HIM TO ATTEMPT TO PROTECT MDAP MATERIAL IN THE TERMS OF THE CEASE-FIRE. /309-1

071754 CHIEF MAAG SUBMITTED 2ND REPORT ON INDOCHINA EQUIPMENT. /309-1

071854 UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE WALTER BEDELL SMITH TALKED WITH PREMIER MENDES-FRANCE ABOUT MDAP EQUIPMENT WHO PROMISED TO DISCUSS PROBLEM WITH THE APPROPRIATE FRENCH MEN. /309-1.

071954 SEC.DEF. THRU THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF REQUESTED CHIEF MAAG TO INFORM ON SPECIFIC FRENCH PLANS FOR SAFEGUARDING MDAP EQUIPMENT IN INDOCHINA. /309-1

072054 CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA MESSAGE SAID FRENCH PLANS FOR RECOVERY OF MDAP EQUIPMENT WERE ADEQUATE SO NO PROBLEMS.

072054 GENEVA AGREEMENT SIGNED.

072054 PARTITION AT THE 17TH PARALLEL BECAME A FACT. DIEM DISCLAIMED ANY OBLIGATION TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GENEVA ACCORDS WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT DID NOT SIGN. /WID 41-57.

072154 GENERAL DELTIEL ON BEHALF OF ELY, AND TA QUANG BUU, THE VIETMINH VICE-MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE SIGNED THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENTS. /LANCASTER.

072754 CEASE FIRE (INDOCHINA WAR) WENT INTO EFFECT IN NORTH VIETNAM.

08 54 MUTUAL SECURITY ACT WAS AMENDED TO PROVIDE FOR DIRECT AID TO THE VIETNAMESE.



08 54 THE GOVERNMENT OF PREMIER NGO DINH DIEM DID NOT CONTROL THE ARMY, LACKED A COMPETENT ADMINISTRATION, HAD NO AUTHORITY OVER THE TERRITORIES RULED FOR MANY YEARS BY THE SECTS, AND STRUGGLED DESPERATELY TO HOUSE AND FEED THE GROWING MASSES OF REFUGEES.

08 54 ACCORDING TO A DA ACSI REPORT OF JAN-56, AFTER GENEVA 25 PER CENT OF THE VNA DESERTED.

080154 CEASE FIRE WENT INTO EFFECT IN CENTRAL VIETNAM.

080454 THE JCS REPLIED TO CHIEF MAAG'S RECOMMENDATION FOR U.S. TRAINING OF VNA. THIS SHOULD ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN IF THE FOLLOWING PRECONDITIONS MET, 1) STRONG STABLE GOVERNMENT 2) FORMAL REQUEST FROM COUNTRY INVOLVED TO U.S. FOR AID AND TRAINING ASSISTANCE 3) FRENCH SHOULD WITHDRAW FROM, AND GRANT FULL INDEPENDENCE TO ASSOCIATED STATES. DULLES HELD THAT ALTHOUGH CONDITIONS WERE NOT MET BY VIETNAM, IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THE U.S. TRAIN TO ENABLE THE COUNTRY TO BECOME STRONG AND STABLE. IN NSC 5427/2 THE ISSUE WAS DECIDED IN FAVOR OF U.S. TRAINING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY. /JCS HIST.

080754 CHIEF MAAG INDOCHINA WAS APPOINTED OVERALL COORDINATOR FOR U.S. PARTICIPATION IN EVACUATION OF NORTH VIETNAM. /217155.

081154 DULLES IN A NOTE TO PREMIER MENDES-FRANCE STATED U.S. WAS PREPARED TO DIRECTLY ASSIST, INCLUDING MILITARY AND BUDGETARY, AND TO CONSIDER TRAINING THE ASSOCIATED STATES.

081154 CEASE FIRE WENT INTO EFFECT IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

081154 DEADLINE IN RESPECT TO TOTAL STRENGTH OF FRENCH AND AMERICAN FORCES IN VIETNAM. /SEC REPT.

081154 THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SUPERVISION AND CONTROL IN VIETNAM (SEE ENTRY FOR JULY 20-21, 1954) WAS ESTABLISHED WITH INDIA AS CHAIRMAN AND WITH CANADA AND POLAND AS THE OTHER MEMBERS.

082054 EISENHOWER APPROVED A U.S. POLICY STRESSING WORKING WITH THE FRENCH ONLY INSOFAR AS IS NECESSARY. OCMH NSC 5429/2

082654 REPRESENTATIVES OF FRANCE AND ASSOCIATED STATES BEGAN MEETINGS IN PARIS REPLACING PAU AGREEMENTS OF 1950.

09 54 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY SURVEY TEAM WENT TO VIETNAM.

09 54 DIEM ASKED FRANCE TO WITHDRAW FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE BY MAY 1956. /JCS HIST.

09 54 OPEN CONFLICT BEGAN WITH THE FRENCH-APPOINTED CHIEF OF THE ARMY, GENERAL NGUYEN VAN HINH, WHOM NGO DINH DIEM SOON DISMISSED. WHEN BAO DAI BECAME AWARE THAT IT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR HIM TO PLEASE THE U.S., HE ORDERED GENERAL NGUYEN VAN HINH TO GO TO FRANCE.

091054 A DIEM AGENT INFILTRATED THE ARMY GENERAL STAFF MEETING AND DISCOVERED COUP WAS BEING PLANNED BY GENERAL HINH TO DEPOSE DIEM. DIEM REMOVED HINH AS ARMY CHIEF AND ORDERED HIM OUT OF THE COUNTRY. HINH'S ACTIVITIES DISRUPTED PLANNING ACTIVITIES AT THE VIETNAMESE ARMY GENERAL STAFF, AND CREATED AN IRRESPONSIBLE INSUBORDINATE ATTITUDE WITHIN VNA RANKS. /JCS HIST.

090854 EIGHT POWERS SIGNED THE S.E.ASIA COLLECTIVE DEFENSE TREATY, INCLUDING A PROTOCOL WHICH EXTENDED TO SOUTHERN VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS PROTECTION AGAINST AGGRESSION AND ELIGIBILITY FOR ECONOMIC AID.

091754 OFFICE FOR REFUGEES WAS SET UP UNDER A COMMISSIONER GENERAL WHO WAS GIVEN THE RANK OF SEC. OF STATE. /LANCASTER.

092254 IN A MEMO TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, JCS STATED THAT THE GENEVA AGREEMENT WOULD HINDER THE U.S. IN TRAINING AND EQUIPPING THE VIETNAMESE. THEY ESTIMATED THAT EQUIPMENT IN VIETNAM WAS SUFFICIENT TO SUPPLY VIETNAM. TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WOULD TAKE 3-5 YEARS AND SHOULD HAVE LOW PRIORITY TO OTHER U.S. MILITARY PROGRAMS. NOT A GOOD TIME TO FURTHER INDICATE U.S. TRAINING INTENTIONS RE VIETNAMESE FORCES. THEY WANTED TO RETAIN THE FEC. /JCS HIST.

092454 WASHINGTON CONFERENCE BROUGHT TO LIGHT DIFFICULTIES IN TRAINING THE VNA. DULLES VIEWED THE VNA AS A SMALL FORCE DEVELOPED TO INSURE INTERNAL SECURITY. THE JCS VIEW WAS THAT A FORCE TWICE AS LARGE WAS NEEDED TO PROVIDE TROOPS TO DETER OVERT AGGRESSION ACROSS THE DMZ. /JCS HIST.

THE FRENCH DELEGATES (GUY LACHAMBRE, EDGAR FAURE, GENERAL ELY, AND AMBASSADOR HENRI BONNET) AGREED IN PRINCIPLE THAT THE STEPS TO ACHIEVE TOTAL INDEPENDENCE WOULD BE 1) THE CANCELLATION OF THE PAU AGREEMENTS WHICH GAVE FRANCE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OVER THE ECONOMY, COMMERCE AND FINANCES OF VIETNAM, 2) THE TRANSFER OF THE OVERALL COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL ARMY TO THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, 3) TO PUT THE U.S. MILITARY MISSION IN CHARGE OF TRAINING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY, 4) TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM FULL CONTROL OVER ALL AID FUNDS FROM THE U.S., FINALLY 5) TO WITHDRAW THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS UPON REQUEST OF THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. /J.B. DRAGON.

092554 NGO DINH DIEM REORGANIZED HIS CABINET WITH THE AIM OF WINNING THE COOPERATION OF SOME LEADERS OF THE SECTS.

092754 FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS OF 176,000 WAS SCHEDULED FOR PROGRESSIVE REDUCTION TO 100,000 BY THE END OF 1955. /JCS HIST.

092854 AT A CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON BETWEEN THE FRENCH AND U.S. THE DISPOSITION OF EQUIPMENT WAS DISCUSSED AND THE BUILD-UP OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WITH THE WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH FORCES.

092954 FRANCO-AMERICAN MINUTE OF UNDERSTANDING ON ASSISTING, DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING FREE VIETNAM SIGNED. /STATE MESSAGE 12292.

093054 U.S. WAS CAUTIOUS IN ITS ESTABLISHMENT OF VNA UNTIL DIEM'S POSITION WAS SECURE. /TELG. /JCS HIST.



- 10 54 GEN. J. LAWTON COLLINS WAS DESIGNATED SPECIAL U.S. REPRESENTATIVE IN VIETNAM WITH THE PERSONAL RANK OF AMBASSADOR TO COORDINATE U.S. AID PROGRAMS.
- 10 54 AS VIETMINH WITHDREW FROM THE DELTA AREA, THEY WERE REPLACED BY TROOPS OF THE CAO DAI AND THE HOA DAO ARMIES. /JCS HIST.
- 10 54 SVN GOVERNMENT WAS UNABLE TO ESTABLISH CONTROL IN RURAL AREAS. VIETMINH TOOK OVER LARGE AREAS OF ANNAM AND HOA HAO AND CAO DAI WERE FIGHTING FOR PROVINCES IN THE DELTA. /JSC HIST.
- 10 54 CONTENTION DEVELOPED BETWEEN SOUTH VIETNAMESE GENERAL HINH AND PRES. DIEM.
- 10 54 HINH WAS WARNED BY ELY AND HEATH NOT TO PLOT AGAINST DIEM. /JCS HIST.
- 100254 GENERAL ELY CONFERRED WITH BAO DAI CONCERNING THE WASHINGTON TALKS AND WARNED BAO DAI AGAINST ANTAGONIZING THE AMERICANS. BECAUSE OF THIS, DAI DISCONTINUED GIVING SUPPORT TO GENERAL HINH AGAINST DIEM. /J.B.
- 100854 JEAN SAINTENY WAS INSTALLED IN HANOI AS THE POLITICAL CONTACT OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WITH THE HANOI REGIME, TO SAFEGUARD PRIVATE FRENCH BUSINESS INTERESTS AND TO MAINTAIN A MAXIMUM OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE DRV. FRENCH ENTERPRISES WERE NATIONALIZED BEGINNING THE END OF 1955 WHEN COMMUNISTS DECIDED TO ESTABLISH SOCIALISM. /J.B. DRAGON.
- THE U.S. WAS TRYING TO SEAL OFF NORTH VIETNAM FROM THE SOUTH TO BOYCOTT THE ECONOMY OF THE NORTH AND WAS THREATENING TO BLACKLIST FRENCH BUSINESSES PURSUING A CONTRARY POLICY. FRENCH POLICY, WAS DIRECTLY OPPOSITE. PARIS HAD SECRETLY CONCLUDED AN AGREEMENT WITH HO'S GOVT. GRANTING THE EQUIVALENT OF RECOGNITION. JEAN SAINTENY, IN HANOI, WAS WORKING FOR GOOD POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNIST REGIME, WHICH WOULD SEND A PERMANENT DELEGATION TO PARIS. THE FRENCH WISHED TO KEEP A BIG FOOT IN THE DOOR WHICH WE SOUGHT TO SLAM. THEY BELIEVED THAT THE SOUTH WOULD BE TAKEN OVER BY THE COMMUNISTS IN 1956 BUT THAT THE RUSSIANS AND THE CHINESE COULD NOT SUPPLY MUCH ECONOMIC AID AND A GOOD MARKET FOR FRANCE COULD BE PRESERVED. /OFLEM-CWO NOTE 1.
- 100954 THE VIETMINH OCCUPIED HANOI. THE FRENCH AND SMM TEAM EVACUATED HANOI. /SMM REPT.
- 101154 IN MEMO TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILSON, DULLES EXPRESSED IDEA THAT SECRETARY SHOULD CUT DOWN ON THE SIZE OF FORCES REQUIRED IN THE COUNTRIES OF S.E. ASIA SINCE NONE NEED ACT ALONE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THE FRENCH REQUEST FOR FUNDS TO SUPPORT THE FEC PLUS A 150,000 MAN ARMY WAS UNFEASIBLE FOR U.S. AT THAT TIME. /JCS HIST.
- 101154 THE COMMUNIST VIETMINH REGIME FORMALLY TOOK OVER CONTROL OF HANOI AND NORTH VIETNAM.



- 101554 SENATOR MANSFIELD ISSUED A REPORT ON INDOCHINA. IT SPOKE OUT SHARPLY AGAINST PLANS TO REPLACE DIEM. IF DIEM WAS OVERTHROWN THEN THE U.S. SHOULD CONSIDER AN IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION OF ALL AID TO VIETNAM AND THE FRENCH UNION FORCES THERE, EXCEPT THAT OF A HUMANITARIAN NATURE. MANSFIELD DEFENDED DIEM ON THE GROUNDS THAT HE HAD A REPUTATION THROUGHOUT VIETNAM FOR INTENSE NATIONALISM AND EQUALLY INTENSE INCORRUPTIBILITY. HE DENOUNCED THE INCREDIBLE CAMPAIGN OF SUBVERSION BY INTRIGUE AND THE CONSPIRACY OF NON-COOPERATION AND SABOTAGE THAT HAD STOOD IN THE WAY OF DIEM'S FORGING AHEAD WITH HIS PROPOSED CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM. /U.S.
- 101554 THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS INCAPABLE OF PERFORMING MINOR POLICE ACTIONS WITHOUT FRENCH STAFF AND LOGISTICS. /JCS HIST.
- 101854 JCS VIEWED THE POLITICAL NECESSITY OF TRAINING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS WORTH THE RISK. /JCS HIST.
- 101954 IN MEMO TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, JCS ELABORATED ON THE JUSTIFICATION FOR INCREASED VIETNAMESE ARMY. SEATO DID NOT PROVIDE FOR MILITARY COMMITMENTS BY MEMBER COUNTRIES. THE REQUESTED WITHDRAWAL OF FEC WOULD CREATE A SERIOUS VACUUM TO COPE WITH RESIDUAL VIETMINH AGGRESSION. VIETNAM OBJECTIVE WAS THE LIMITED DEFENSE OF THE 17TH PARALLEL TO DETER AGGRESSION AND THE MAINTENANCE OF INTERNAL SECURITY. JCS DID NOT WANT TO TRAIN SOUTH VIETNAMESE WITH ONLY A 342-MAN MAAG. BUT IF TRAINING WAS NECESSARY, THEY FELT THAT FRANCE "HANDS OFF" WAS ESSENTIAL. /JCS HIST.
- 102254 NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL APPROVED THE OPERATIONS CO-ORDINATING BOARD CALLING FOR A LIMITED AND INTERIM TRAINING PROGRAM. A MESSAGE TO AMBASSADOR HEATH IN SAIGON AND GENERAL O'DANIEL INSTRUCTED THEM TO COLLABORATE IN ESTABLISHING A PROGRAM THAT WOULD IMPROVE THE LOYALTY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VNA. THIS SURPRISED THE FRENCH. /JCS HIST.
- 102254 PRES. EISENHOWER ORDERED A CRASH PROGRAM TO STRENGTHEN THE DIEM GOVERNMENT AND A LONG RANGE PROGRAM TO BUILD UP VIETNAMESE FORCES.
- 102454 PRES. EISENHOWER SENT A LETTER TO PREMIER DIEM OF SOUTH VIETNAM STATING THAT BEGINNING JAN. 1, 1955, AMERICAN ASSISTANCE WOULD BE GIVEN NO LONGER THROUGH FRENCH AUTHORITIES, BUT DIRECTLY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM. THE LETTER ALSO STATED THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HOPED THEY WOULD BE MET BY UNDERTAKING INDISPENSIBLE REFORMS.
- 102654 GENERAL HINH ATTACKED THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE.
- 102654 IN A MEMO FROM SEC.DEF. TO JCS THE VIEWS OF PRESIDENT EISENHOWER WERE EXPRESSED RE VIETNAMESE ARMY TRAINING. IT SHOULD BE A LONG RANGE PROGRAM INVOLVING A MINIMUM NUMBER OF FREE VIETNAMESE FORCES, EMPHASIZING THE INTERNAL SECURITY MISSION. /JCS HIST.
- 102754 AMERICAN MILITARY INFLUENCE IN THE VIETNAMESE ARMY BEGAN WITH THE PLACEMENT OF 3 MAAG OFFICERS AT VIETNAMESE ARMY HEADQUARTERS, 1 IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY AND 1 AT EACH REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS. THE DECISION WAS MADE BY AMBASSADOR HEATH, AND GEN. L'DANIEL WITH GEN. ELY'S APPROVAL. /JCS HIST.

11 54 VIETNAM ARMY STRENGTH WAS 170,000. IT WAS POORLY TRAINED AND ORGANIZED AND HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON FRENCH FOR STAFF, LOGISTICS SUPPORT AND ADVICE. /JCS HIST.

11 54 THE FRENCH ASKED THE U.S. TO SUPPORT A 100,000 MAN FEC AT A COST OF \$330 MILLION. /JCS HIST.

11 54 SSM SURVEY OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY REPORTED GOOD TROOP-CIVILIAN RAPPORT.

110854 COLLINS ARRIVED IN SAIGON AS PRES. EISENHOWER'S REPRESENTATIVE.

110854 HEATH AND COLLINS FELT SOME SUPPORT TO FEC ESSENTIAL TO PREVENT A VACUUM THAT VNA COULD NOT FILL WHICH WOULD RESULT IN VIETMINH TAKEOVER. FEC PRESENCE ESSENTIAL TO U.S. PROGRAM. /JCS HIST.

111654 COLLINS ISSUED HIS COMPROMISE BETWEEN DEPT. OF STATE AND JCS' PLAN ON STRENGTH OF VNA. IT CALLED FOR A 77,685 MAN ARMY WITH 4,000 CIVILIANS AND A SMALL AIR FORCE AND NAVY. /JCS HIST.

111754 THE JCS APPROVED COLLINS' PLAN BUT REMITATED THAT HIS FORCE COULD NOT PROTECT SOUTH VIETNAM AGAINST EXTERNAL ATTACK. /JCS HIST.

111754 IN A MEMO TO THE PRESIDENT, DULLES REITERATED GENERAL COLLINS' VIEW THAT IT WOULD BE DISASTROUS FOR FEC TO WITHDRAW. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO SUBSIDIZE UP TO \$100 MILLION. THE VNA SHOULD BE REDUCED TO 77,000 AND TRAINING RESPONSIBILITY ASSUMED BY THE U.S. ?JCS HIST.

111954 HHHH LEFT SAIGON FOR FRANCE AT THE REQUEST OF BAO DAI. /JCS HIST.

112054 MENDES-FRANCE VISITED WASHINGTON AFTER WHICH THE DETAILS OF THE AGREEMENT OF THE SEPTEMBER WASHINGTON CONFERENCE WERE MADE PUBLIC. /J.B.DRAGON.

112354 NIE 63-7-54 REPORTED A DEMORALIZED, DISORGANIZED VNA. LEADERSHIP AND CAPABILITY TO DEAL WITH INTERNAL DISORDERS WERE BOTH LACKING. THE VIETNAMESE GENERAL STAFF, BUSY WITH POLITICS, NEGLECTED THE ARMY WITH THE RESULT THAT THE ARMY WAS INCAPABLE OF OCCUPYING AND PACIFYING AREAS FROM WHICH THE VIETMINH HAD WITHDRAWN. TRAINING OF THE VNA WAS BEING PERFORMED BY 4,800 FRENCH OFFICERS OF THE FRENCH MILITARY MISSION TO VIETNAM. THIS MISSION WAS TO BE INCREASED TO 6,000 BY THE END OF 19

VIETNAMESE ARMY STRENGTH WAS ESTIMATED TO BE 170,000 REGULARS AND 10,000 AUXILIARIES. REGULARS WERE ORGANIZED IN 5 INFANTRY REGIMENTS, 152 COMBAT BATTALIONS. 20 PERCENT OF THE INFANTRY UNITS HAD FRENCH OFFICERS AND 50 PERCENT OF LOGISTICS AND TECHNICAL UNITS WERE CADRES OF FRENCH PERSONNEL. THE VNA WAS DEPICTED AS TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE AS A RESULT OF ITS DEPENDENCY ON THE FRENCH FOR ALL ADVICE AND SUPPORT.

THE DIEM GOVERNMENT PROPOSED A 200,000 MAN ARMY BY THE END OF 1954 TO BE INCREASED TO 225,000 BY THE END OF 1955. COST--\$450 MILLION.



THE SECT ARMIES WERE COMPOSED OF 10,000 CAO DAIST TROOPS, 8,000 HOA HAO, 2,600 BINH XUYEN, 4,500 URBAN POLICE UNDER BINH XUYEN.

THERE WAS LITTLE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON SEMI-MILITARY OR POLICE FORCES.

112454 U.S. AGREED TO SUPPORT THE FEC AT THE \$100 MILLION LEVEL. /JCS HIST.

12 54 FRENCH DECIDED TO ACCELERATE FEC WITHDRAWAL FROM VIETNAM. THEY PERSISTED IN THE VIEW THAT IT WAS U.S. RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDOCHINA'S REMAINING IN FREE WORLD SPHERE. (DULLES AND M'DES-FRANCH ARGUMENT) /JCS HIST.

12 54 GENERAL COLLINS URGED DIEM TO APPOINT QUAT TO MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. /JCS HIST.

12 54 BECAUSE OF DESERTIONS AND DEMOBILIZATION, THE VIETNAM ARMY WAS DOWN TO 180,000.

12 54 VIETNAMESE MINISTER OF DEFENSE HO THING MOTH OBJECTED TO THE FORCE LEVEL IN THE COLLINS-ELY AGREEMENT ON TRAINING AS TOO LOW, THE 8,800 LEVEL NOT MUCH LARGER THAN THE SECT ARMIES. IT WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS ECONOMIC AND MILITARY REPERCUSSIONS. /JCS HIST.

121254 DIEM NAMED GENERAL LE VAN TY TO BE THE NEW CHIEF OF STAFF REPLACING GENERAL HIEH. THE APPOINTMENT APPEARED BASED MORE OR IE'S LOYALTY TO DIEM THAN ON ABILITY. FRENCH WERE OPPOSED AND AGREED ONLY AFTER DIEM AGREED TO APPOINT GENERAL NGUYEN VAN VY AS INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE ARMED FORCES.

121354 COLLINS AND ELY AGREED ON A FORCE STRUCTURE. FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING AN INDEPENDENT VMA WAS TO BE ENTRUSTED TO U.S. CHIEF MAAG UNDER BROAD AUTHORITY FROM GENERAL ELY. /JCS HIST.

121554 GEN. COLLINS EXPRESSED GRAVE RESERVATIONS IN RESPECT TO CAPABILITIES OF DIEM TO ESTABLISH A VIABLE GOVERNMENT. HE URGED THE U.S. STATE DEPT. TO SEEK OUT ALTERNATIVES TO DIEM AND RE-EVALUATE PLANS TO ASSIST SOUTHEAST ASIA. /JCS HIST.

121954 DULLES-M'DES-FRANCE MEETING. DULLES' POSITION VIS-A-VIS DIEM WAS TO GIVE HIM EVERY OPPORTUNITY BUT PROBABLY A GOOD IDEA TO HAVE AN ALTERNATIVE TO HIM IF HE FAILED. FRENCH INTERPRETED THIS AS A COMMITMENT TO CHANGE WHICH THE U.S. DENIED AND AN ARGUMENT ENSUED. /JCS HIST.

122554 AT THE TRIPARTITE MEETINGS THE PROBLEM OF TRAINING RE ADEQUATE STAFF WAS DISCUSSED AND THE ISSUE OF EXCHANGING TRAINING PERSONNEL RAISED. /JCS HIST.

122554 GENERAL COLLINS WAS AGAINST TRAINING IF SUBTERFUGE HAD TO BE USED TO CIRCUMVENT ARTICLE 16 OF THE GENEVA AGREEMENT. COLLINS DID NOT THINK ARTICLE 16 WOULD INTERFERE WITH TRAINING. /JCS HIST.

129254 NEW ACCORDS WERE SIGNED PROVIDING FOR FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE.

123154 COLLINS RAISED THE VIETNAMESE ARMY FORCE LEVEL GOALS TO 100,000.



123154 NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION DIRECTIVE (PACIFICATION) WAS ISSUED BY PRES. DIEM. THIS HAD BEEN DEVELOPED BY A JOINT FRENCH-U.S. WORKING GROUP. /SM4 REPT.

123154 THE U.S. ANNOUNCED THAT, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 1955, IT WOULD BEGIN TO SUPPLY FINANCIAL AID DIRECTLY TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF VIETNAM, CAMBODIA AND LAOS FOR THE PURPOSE OF STRENGTHENING THEIR DEFENSES AGAINST THE THREAT OF COMMUNIST SUBVERSION AND AGGRESSION.

01 55 THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ITS PLANS TO REDUCE THE STRENGTH OF THE ARMY FROM 217,000 TO 100,000. THE CAO DAI HAD 25,000 MEN, THE HOA HAO HAD 20,000.

01 55 RE-EVALUATION OF U.S. POLICY IN VIETNAM WAS UNDERTAKEN. /JCS HIST.

01 55 LANDSDALE WAS TRANSFERRED TO TRIM TO HEAD NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION. EFFORT WAS DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS. FIRST WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PARAMILITARY AND SUPPORT OPERATIONS, SECOND FOR POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE. /SM4 REPT.

01 55 6,000 HOA HAO AND CAO DAI TROOPS INTEGRATED INTO THE VNA. /JCS HIST.

010155 U.S. PROMISED TO RENDER DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO VIETNAM, ON THE BASIS OF THE EXISTING MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT OF DECEMBER 1950, FOR SUPPORT OF VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES.

010555 DIEM'S CONTROL OVER ASSISTANCE FUNDS BEGAN. IT ALLOWED HIM TO BUILD UP HIS OWN STRENGTH AND SECURE LOYALTY OF ARMY.

010555 CARDINAL SPILLMAN VISITED SAIGON.

010555 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILSON ASKED JCS TO REVIEW U.S. POSITION IN VIETNAM AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS RELATIVE TO EIGHT QUESTIONS. /JCS HIST.

010855 EVER SINCE THE MILITARY COLLAPSE OF TONKIN THE FRENCH WERE READY TO WRITE OFF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT AND PARTICULARLY SINCE IT HAD BEEN LED BY A STRONG ANTI-FRENCH PRIME MINISTER. /LONDON ECONOMIST.

010855 THE FRENCH REVISED THE COLLINS-ELY TRAINING AGREEMENT AND SUBMITTED IT TO THE U.S. /JCS HIST.

011055 GENERAL ELY REPORTED THAT FRANCE WOULD WITHDRAW ITS FORCES AS SOON AS THERE WAS A SECURE GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

011255 THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT FORMALLY TOOK OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PORT OF SAIGON FROM THE FRENCH. /J.B. DRAGON.

011355 SOUTH VIETNAM ANNOUNCED PLANS TO CUT ITS 217,000 MAN ARMY BACK TO 100,000.

011455 DIEM LURED A HOA HAO OFFICER COLONEL NGUYEN VAN HUE, THE CHIEF OF STAFF GENERALISSIMO SOAI, INTO HIS CAMP. HE BROUGHT 3,500 MEN WITH HIM. THE MOVE BOLSTERED DIEM IN THE DISPUTE OVER THE CAMAU REGION. A FEW WEEKS LATER, MAJOR NGUYEN DAY JOINED DIEM WITH 1,500 MORE MEN WHICH HAD BEEN HOLDING THE CAN THO AREA. AT THE END OF JANUARY, THE CAO DAI LEADER TRINH MINH TAY RALLIED AGAIN AS A SHOW OF SUPPORT AFTER HIS INITIAL RALLYING IN NOVEMBER 1954. /J.B. DRAGON.

- 011955 PRESIDENT DIEM, GEN. COLLINS AND THE VIETNAMESE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON FORCE STRUCTURE AND TRAINING PROGRAM FOR THE VNA TO WHICH GENERAL ELY CONCURRED. /1-137.
- 012055 THE U.S., FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS AGREED IN SAIGON THAT THAT WOULD ASSUME FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASSISTING THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT IN THE ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING OF ITS ARMED FORCES, UNDER THE OVERALL AUTHORITY OF GENERAL PAUL ELY, FRENCH COMMANDER IN CHIEF, AND IN CO-OPERATION WITH THE FRENCH MISSION. THIS ACCORD, REACHED AFTER THREE MONTHS OF DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS, SAVED FRENCH SENSIBILITIES SOMEWHAT BUT TRANSFERRED EFFECTIVE POWER TO THE U.S., REPRESENTED BY GENERAL LAWTON COLLINS, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO VIETNAM. GENERAL O'DANIEL WAS APPOINTED TO HEAD THE U.S. TRAINING MISSION, WHICH AIMED AT A 140,000 MAN ARMY, WELL TRAINED AND POLITICALLY INDOCTRINATED TO COMBAT COMMUNIST AGGRESSION FROM THE NORTH. /FLEM-CWO/ INT.
- 012055 GEN. COLLINS ACCEPTED THE TASK OF TRCOP ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING OF THE NATIONAL ARMY UNDER THE OVERALL AUTHORITY OF GEN. ELY. THE REGULAR ARMY WAS TO HAVE 100,000 MEN BACKED BY 150,000 RESERVES WHICH WERE TO BE UNDER THE OPERATIONAL COMMAND OF THE VIETNAMESE NOT THE FRENCH.
- 0120555 GEN. J. LAWTON COLLINS SUBMITTED HIS REPORT ON VIETNAM TO THE SEC. OF STATE AND NSC. IN THIS REPORT HE CALLED FOR A STRONG SEATO PACT COMMITMENT TO REACT IN CASE OF HOSTILITIES. HE QUESTIONED FRENCH INTENTIONS IN VIETNAM, BACKED DIEM AS BEING THE BEST LEADER FOR VIETNAM. /1-125
- 012155 DIEM REQUESTED THAT COMMAND FOR THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES BE TRANSFERRED FROM FRENCH TO HIM, AND THE TRAINING AND ORGANIZATION OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY BE HANDED OVER TO AMERICAN OFFICERS. (SEE 021154 ENTRY) /J.B.DRAGON.
- 0124-0210 1955 GENERAL COLLINS WAS CALLED TO WASHINGTON BY THE PRESIDENT FOR A CONFERENCE ON THE AID PROGRAM. THE FRENCH HAD AGREED TO THE U.S. ASSUMING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY TRAINING.
- 012755 GENERAL COLLINS URGED NSC TO RECOMMEND A STRONG U.S. POLICY IN VIETNAM. THIS WAS DONE. /JCS HIST.
- 013155 FRENCH STOPPED SUPPORTING THE SECT ARMIES. /JCS HIST.
- 020155 PREMIER DIEM REPORTED THAT THE CAO DAIST GENERAL TRINH MINH TAY OFFERED THE GOVERNMENT THE USE OF HIS 5,000 MAN ARMY.
- 020155 IN THE GOQUAO AREA, HOA HAO TROOPS ATTACKED A SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY BATTALION. AFTER THE VIETMINH HAD WITHDRAWN FROM THE CAMAU PENINSULA THE REGULAR ARMY AND THE HAO HAO FOUGHT OVER CONTROL OF THE AREA.
- 020355 SEC.DEF. MEMO EXPRESSED THE VIEW OF NSC THAT FRENCH SUPPORT WAS NEEDED TO INSURE VIETNAM SURVIVAL.
- 021155 JCS ADVISED SEC.DEF. U.S. SHOULD NOT ENTER INTO COMBINED MILITARY PLANNING FOR DEFENSE OF SEATO AREA NOR DISCLOSE ITS PLANS TO SEATO MEMBERS. /JCS HIST.



021155 FRANCE TURNED OVER THE COMMAND OF SOUTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY FORCES TO THE DIEM GOVERNMENT, LEAVING GENERAL ELY AS THE COMMANDER OF THE REMAINING FRENCH FORCES. FRENCH SUBSIDIES TO VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES CAME TO A END IN THE AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN FRENCH GENERAL AGOSTINI AND VIETNAMESE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL LE VAN TY.

021255 U.S.-FRENCH AGREEMENT AT GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL WAS REACHED RE COLLINS-ELY TRAINING PLAN. /JCS HIST.

021255 THE VIETNAMESE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE STATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDED THE SECTS TO BECOME PART OF THE NATIONAL ARMY.

021255 COLLINS-ELY AGREEMENT WENT INTO EFFECT. THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP (MAAG) TOOK OVER THE TRAINING OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY, FOLLOWING THE RELINQUISHING OF COMMAND AUTHORITY BY THE FRENCH.

021255 PRES. DIEM ANNOUNCED THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ORGANIZING AND TRAINING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WOULD BE VESTED IN GEN. O'DANIEL, CHIEF OF THE U.S. UNDER THE OVERALL AUTHORITY OF GENERAL ELY. AMERICAN PERSONNEL, SAID, WOULD BE USED CONCURRENTLY WITH FRENCH PERSONNEL AS ADVISORS AND INSTRUCTORS OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES. DEFENSE MINISTER MINH STATED THAT THE AVERAGE STRENGTH OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES DURING 1955 WOULD BE 140,000 IN ACTIVE AND READY RESERVE CATEGORIES.

021255 LT. GEN. O'DANIEL'S STAFF NUMBERED 300 AMERICAN OFFICERS, WITH 1,000 FRENCH OFFICERS AVAILABLE. \$200-MILLION OF U.S. AID WAS TO BE SPENT ON NATIONAL FORCES.

021355 GENERAL TRINH MINH TAY AND 2,500 MEN SWORE FEALTY TO THE SOUTH VIETNAM GOVERNMENT.

021955 PRES. EISENHOWER DECLARED, IN A LETTER TO BAO DAI, CHIEF OF STATE OF VIETNAM, THAT PREMIER DIEM'S ANNOUNCED PROGRAMS OF LAND REFORM AND REORGANIZATION OF THE ARMED FORCES SHOULD, WHEN FULLY CARRIED OUT, FURTHER INCREASE THE STABILITY AND UNITY OF GOVERNMENT AND THAT HE HAD CONCURRED IN GENERAL COLLINS' RECOMMENDATION TO CONTINUE AND EXPAND SUPPORT FOR FREE VIETNAM.

021955 S.E.ASIA COLLECTIVE DEFENSE TREATY (SEATO)--WITH ITS PROTOCOL COVERING VIETNAM, CAMBODIA, AND LAOS--WENT INTO FORCE.

022255 THE U.S., FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE MILITARY EXPERTS WEIGHED PLANS TO BUILD THE VIETNAMESE ARMY UNDER U.S. SUPERVISION.

022755 TRAINING RELATIONS AND INSTRUCTION MISSION (TRIM) ESTABLISHED. TRIM WAS A COMBINED U.S.-FRENCH STAFF AND FIELD ADVISORY EFFORT. IT WAS THE OUTGROWTH OF THE COLLINS-ELY AGREEMENTS. TRIM CALLED FOR 220 OF THE SPACES ALLOTTED IN MAAG. IT WAS EXCLUDED FROM THE VIETNAMESE NAVY AND AIR FORCES. /217155, JCS HIST.

03 55 ONLY 81 PERSONS WERE AVAILABLE FOR ASSIGNMENT TO TRIM. /217155.

03 55 NATIONAL ARMY VS. SECT CIVIL WAR: (MARCH-APRIL)

- 03 55 FRENCH PREMIER FAURE STATED THAT FRANCE WOULD WITHDRAW THE EXPEDITIONAL CORPS AT THE DEMAND OF THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. CORPS STRENGTH HAD BEEN REDUCED SINCE OCTOBER 1954 FROM 175,000 TO 30,000. MOST WERE STATIONED AT CAP ST. JACQUES.
- 03 55 DIEM SENT NGUYEN HUU CHAU TO PARIS TO ASK THAT AUTHORITY OVER ALL TROOPS IN VIETNAM INCLUDING FRENCH BE VESTED IN THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT. FRENCH GOVERNMENT WOULD AGREE TO NOTHING BUT SEPARATE COMMANDS.
- 030155 DULLES VISITED SAIGON AS PART OF HIS TOUR OF THE FAR EAST AND CONFERRED WITH GENERAL ELY AND AMBASSADOR BONNET ON TROOP TRAINING BY THE U.S. THE FRENCH FEAR U.S. ENCROACHMENT.
- 030455 THE CAO DAI POPE ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF THE UNITED FRONT OF NATIONALIST FORCES. /JCS HIST.
- 030455 THE CAO DAI BEGAN A CIVIL WAR AND WERE JOINED BY THE HOA HAO AND BINH XUYEN.
- 030855 THE RELIGIOUS SECT REBELS STAGED UPRISINGS IN BALANG AND CAMAU PENINSULA. DIEM PLACED HIS PALACE UNDER HEAVY GUARD AND ORDERED THE VIETNAMESE TO DESTROY THE REBEL BANDS.
- 031155 THE U.S. FAVORED A MEETING OF DEPUTIES AT THE WORKING LEVEL TO CONSIDER A CUT IN FRENCH MILITARY FORCES AND THE FORMATION OF A MODERN VIETNAMESE DEFENSE FORCE RATHER THAN A THREE-MINISTER CONFERENCE AS THE FRENCH PROPOSED.
- 031255 DIEM SENT 40 INFANTRY BATTALIONS AGAINST BACUT'S FORCES IN THE THOTHO AREA AND REPORTED THAT THE BALANG AREA WAS UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL.
- 032155 UNITED FRONT RELEASED DECLARATION AND MOTION AGAINST DIEM. /JCS HIST.
- 032855 DIEM'S TROOPS OCCUPY CENTRAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS. /JCS HIST.
- END OF MARCH 1955 GENERAL ELY, HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR FRANCE AND COMMANDER OF THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS, FEARING A CIVIL WAR WHICH WOULD ENDANGER FRENCH PROPERTY AND LIVES STEPPED IN TO STOP DIEM FROM CRUSHING THE BINH XUYEN. HE WAS NO FRIEND OF THE SECTS. /J.B. DRAGON.
- 032955 IN THE NAME OF THE NATIONAL FRONT OF THE SECTS AND OTHER DISSIDENT GROUPS THE BINH XUYEN, AFTER FIRST ISSUING AN ULTIMATUM, ATTACKED THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT BY FIRING AT THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. THE NATIONAL ARMY REACTED VIGOROUSLY. THE FRENCH INTERFERED, AND WITH AMBASSADOR COLLINS' SUPPORT IMPOSED AN ARMISTICE ON THE GOVERNMENT. THE BINH XUYEN WERE IN CONTROL OF THE POLICE IN SAIGON. AN ARMED REVOLT WAS PRECIPITATED THAT ULTIMATELY SPREAD INTO LARGE-SCALE DISSIDENCE IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCES WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF ELEMENTS OF THE CAO DAI AND HOA HAO RELIGIOUS SECTS.
- 032955 BINH XUYEN ATTACKED POLICE HEADQUARTERS. /JCS HIST.



032955 ELY IMPOSED A CEASE-FIRE DURING WHICH THE BINH XUYEN AND FRENCH TOOK UP FORTIFIED POSITIONS IN SAIGON. SOME SECTORS WERE PUT OFF-LIMITS TO NATIONAL ARMY TROOPS. THE FRENCH COMMAND STILL CONTROLLED ALL SUPPLIES FOR THE VIETNAMESE ARMY AND WERE WITHHOLDING AMMUNITION AND FUEL.

033155 COLLINS ADVISED THE U.S. STATE DEPT. TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES TO DIEM.  
/JCS HIST.

APR-NOV 1955 FRENCH COMPONENT OF TRIM REDUCED TO 122 FROM 268. /JCS HIST.

040755 COLLINS-ELY MEETING AT WHICH ELY CONCLUDED DIEM HAD TO BE REPLACED.  
/JCS HIST.

040755 GEN. COLLINS' RECOMMENDATION TO DULLES WAS TO REMOVE DIEM. /MSG 4399

040755 GEN. ELY FELT TRIM COULD ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE VNA IN A FEW MONTHS.  
/MSG 4382.

041055 SVN GOVERNMENT SET UP A CIVIL GUARD FORCE OF 40,000 TO HELP CONTROL AREAS EVACUATED BY THE VIETMINH.

041555 WHEN IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT DIEM WOULD RENEW HIS ATTACK ON THE BINH XUYEN COLLINS BECAME ALMOST EMPHATIC IN HIS OPPOSITION TO DIEM. /J.B. DRAGON.

042055 COLLINS RETURNED TO WASHINGTON FOR AN AID CONFERENCE. (APRIL 20-30)  
ADVOCATED THAT DIEM HAD TO BE REPLACED.

042255 SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND VIETMINH TROOPS BEGAN LARGE SCALE MOVEMENTS INTO AREAS ASSIGNED UNDER THE TRUCE.

042355 DIEM ANNOUNCED GENERAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN 3 OR 4 MONTHS. THIS WAS A POLITICAL MOVE TO MAINTAIN HIMSELF IN POWER. /J.B. DRAGON.

042655 DIEM OUSTED THE REBEL NATIONAL POLICE CHIEF LAI VAN SANG, STRIPPED THE BINH XUYEN OF ITS POLICE POWER, APPOINTED NGUYEN NGOC LE IN SANG'S PLACE AND SET A DEADLINE FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE POLICE FORCE TO REPORT.

042755 DULLES AND COLLINS AFTER CONFERRING WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP STATED THE U.S. POSITION WAS TO CONSIDER A SHIFT OF SUPPORT FROM DIEM BUT IF FRENCH WOULD GUARANTEE FULL BACKING TO THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT EVOLVED AND WOULD RESOLVE ITS AMBIGUOUS POSITION RELATIVE TO NORTH VIETNAM. /JCS HIST.

042755 DIEM-SECT TRUCE WAS BROKEN. /JCS HIST.

042855 BAO DAI ORDERED THAT THE MILITARY POWER BE TURNED OVER TO THE OPPOSITION GENERAL NGUYEN VAN VY, BUT DIEM IGNORED THE ORDER.

042855 CIVIL WAR BROKE OUT IN SAIGON. DIEM ORDERED THE VIETNAMESE ARMY TO ATTACK.

043055 FRANCE UNDER THE TRUCE ACCORD, CUT ITS MILITARY FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM TO 90,000 WHILE REMOVING MOST TROOPS FROM CAMBODIA AND LAOS.

043055 THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY CONGRESS, A REPORTED BROAD BASED GROUP, CALLED ON DIEM TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT AND ELIMINATE BAO DAI. /JCS HIST.

050155 GENERAL NGUYEN VAN VY TOOK CONTROL OF SOUTH VIETNAM FOR A DAY. HE HELD DIEM PALACE PRISONER AND ORDERED TROOPS INTO STRATEGIC SAIGON POSITIONS. MILITARY LEADERS WERE CONFUSED BY THE COMMAND SHIFT AND CLAIMED THAT IT BLOCKED AN OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE REBELS. BY THE NEXT DAY DIEM RESUMED CONTROL WITH GENERAL LE VAN TY'S HELP.

050255 THE NATIONAL ARMY OPENED AN OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE REBELS OUTSIDE SAIGON.

050555 THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE COMPRISING SOME 4,000 DIEM SUPPORTERS MET AND DEMANDED REMOVAL OF BAO DAI.

050855 AT TRIPARTITE MEETINGS (US-FRANCE-GREAT BRITAIN, MAY 8-14) FAURE THREATENED TO WITHDRAW THE FEC BECAUSE OF U.S.-FRENCH DISAGREEMENT OVER WITHDRAWAL OF DIEM. DULLES BELIEVED HIS THREAT. /JCS HIST. DULLES AGREED THAT BAO DAI COULD BE RETAINED IF HE STOPPED INTERFERING WITH DIEM'S EXERCISE OF POWER. DULLES REFUSED TO SEE BAO DAI IN PARIS. /J.B. DRAGON.

050955 JCS MEMO TO SEC.DEF. STATED THAT THE VIA WAS LITTLE GOOD, THAT PRESENCE OF AN OUTSIDE FORCE IN VIETNAM WAS ESSENTIAL AND THAT EVENTUAL FRENCH WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE DESIRED.  
/353-1

051055 THE REBELLION WAS BROKEN, DIEM RECONSTITUTED HIS GOVERNMENT BY FORMING A NEW CABINET COMPOSED LARGELY OF HIS OWN FOLLOWERS.

051155 GENERAL NGUYEN VAN HINH WAS RELIEVED OF HIS GENERALSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE VIETNAMESE ARMY.

051155 IN TALKS BETWEEN FAURE AND DULLES, THE U.S. HELD THAT THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL OF FORCES SHOULD BE CO-ORDINATED WITH THE TRAINING AND ORGANIZATION OF VIETNAM'S NATIONAL ARMY TO ASSURE THAT NATION'S DEFENSE. THE VIETNAM SITUATION DID NOT LEND ITSELF TO A CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE U.S., (I.E.-THE U.S. IN THE FUTURE WOULD ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF FRANCE.) /JCS HIST.

051255 DIEM HOPED THAT FRANCE WOULD MOVE ITS EXPEDITIONARY CORPS TO THE 17TH PARALLEL AND NOT KEEP THEM IN SAIGON, TOURANE AND CAP ST. JACQUES. FELT THE FRENCH TROOPS MAJOR ROLE WAS TO GUARD AGAINST AGGRESSION FROM THE NORTH.

051355 IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ARMISTICE AGREEMENTS, THE FRENCH EVACUATED HAI

051355 FRANCE AND U.S. PRODUCED A TOTAL AGREEMENT ON A POLICY FOR VIETNAM. AGREED TO BACK DIEM WITH DIFFERENCES OF EMPHASIS. FAURE WAS REPORTED TO HAVE OBTAINED FROM DULLES ASSURANCE THAT THE U.S. WOULD LOYALLY BACK FRANCE IN SEEKING TO PREPARE FOR THE 1956 ALL-VIETNAM ELECTIONS.

FAURE REPORTED THAT GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, AND U.S. HAD REACHED A NON-WRITTEN AGREEMENT THAT FRANCE WOULD CONTINUE FORCE WITHDRAWAL BUT POSSIBLY ONE CONTINGENT MIGHT BE LEFT.



051455 GENERAL COLLINS LEFT SAIGON FOR A NATO POSITION. /JCS HIST.

051555 THE IMPERIAL GUARD OF BAO DAI WAS ABOLISHED AND MERGED WITH THE ARMY.

051655 DEADLINE OF WITHDRAWAL FOR FRENCH UNION FORCES TO SOUTH OF 17TH PARALLEL AND VIETMINH TO NORTH.

051855 THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY COMPLETED OCCUPATION OF QUI NHON, HELD BY THE VIETMINH FOR 10 YEARS.

052055 GENERAL ELY DEMANDED TO BE RELIEVED. HE WAS WORN OUT BY HIS EFFORTS TO CARRY OUT AN IMPOSSIBLE MISSION. /J.B.DRAGON.

052055 THE FRENCH COMMAND AGREED TO RETIRE ITS TROOPS FROM THE SAIGON-CHOLON. /J.B. DRAGON.

052055 THE FIRST MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY (MSU) POLICE TECHNICIANS ARRIVED IN VIETNAM, UNDER ICA AUSPICES.

052155 BAO DAI WAS DEPOSED AS EMPEROR.

052155 DIEM SENT THE NATIONAL ARMY REINFORCEMENTS TO THE HAO HAO AREA.

052355 SVN TROOPS WERE FLOWN TO THE HAO HAO AREA IN COCHIN CHINA. ARMY FORCES WERE THERE AS A SAFETY MEASURE -- NO ATTACK WAS PLANNED.

052655 AMBASSADOR G. FREDERICK REINHARDT ARRIVED IN SOUTH VIETNAM REPLACING GENERAL COLLINS.

052955 DIEM ATTACKED SECTS.

06 55 LT.COL.JORGENSEN, ASSIGNED BY GENERAL O'DANIEL TO ASSIST AMBASSADOR COLLINS IN STAFF PLANNING FOR A CIVIL GUARD, WAS REQUESTED BY AMBASSADOR REINHARDT TO CONTINUE THIS WORK. COLONEL VALERIANO AND MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION PERSONNEL WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN THE EARLY NATIONAL POLICE PLANNING PROGRAM.

05 55 DIRECT FRENCH INTERFERENCE IN THE SECT-DIEM FIGHT HAD EFFECTIVELY ENDED. /J.B. DRAGON.

060155 THE VIETNAMESE ARMY TOOK OVER THE SUPPLY SYSTEM WHEN THE FRENCH EVACUATED THE PHU THO DEPOT.

060155 THE NATIONAL ARMY AND POLICE TOOK OVER THE SECURITY OF SAIGON.

060555 THE NATIONAL ARMY BEGAN A LARGE SCALE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE FORCES OF GENERALS BA CUT AND TRAN VAN SOAI SOUTH WEST OF SAIGON.

060655 THE VIETMINH GOVERNMENT DEMANDED TALKS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE GENEVA AGREEMENT TO PREPARE THE ELECTIONS IN JULY, 1956, TO UNIFY VIETNAM.

060655 DIEM INSISTED THAT FRANCE HONOR THE PROMISE MADE BY MENDES-FRANCE AT GENEVA TO WITHDRAW FRENCH TROOPS FROM VIETNAM SINCE THIS WAS THE ONLY WAY THAT FRENCH COLONIAL AEGIS COULD BE REMOVED. FRANCE WAS WILLING TO WITHDRAW BUT WAS NOT ABOUT TO LEAVE ITS LOGISTICAL SUPPORT UNDER VIETNAM CONTROL AS DIEM HOPED. /JCS HIST.

062055 GENERAL ELY LEFT SAIGON AFTER TURNING OVER HIS COMMAND TO GENERAL PIERRE JACQUOT, WHO WAS DESIGNATED ACTING COMMISSIONER GENERAL AND COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF FRENCH UNION FORCES IN INDOCHINA, PENDING NOMINATION OF ELY'S REPLACEMENT. /JCS HIST.

070155 FRANCE FORMALLY RELINQUISHED COMMAND AUTHORITY OVER THE VIETNAMESE NAVY AND AGREED THAT FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE FORCES SHOULD BE UNDER INDEPENDENT COMMANDS.

070155 THE ARVN BEGAN OPERATIONS AGAINST THE HAO HAO IN THE THAT SON AREA.

070255 THE DEPENDENCE OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY COMMAND ON THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND AT LAST CAME TO AN END. THE EXPEDITIONARY CORPS WAS THEN CONCENTRATED IN THE CAP ST. JACQUES VICINITY AND HAD BEEN REDUCED FROM 175,000 TO 30,000 MEN. /J.B. DRAGON.

070355 THE U.S. APPROVED DROPPING THE PLAN TO CUT THE ARMY TO 100,000 MEN SO THE ARMY COULD ABSORB THE ARMIES OF THE RELIGIOUS SECTS.

070755 ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS INSTALLATION AS PRIME MINISTER, DIEM ANNOUNCED THE NATIONAL REFERENDUM SET FOR OCTOBER 23, 1955. /J.B. DRAGON.

070755 FRENCH FORMALLY TRANSFER PHA FRANG AIR BASE TO VIETNAMESE CONTROL.

071655 NGO DINH DIEM DECLARED THAT SOUTH VIETNAM, NOT HAVING SIGNED THE GENEVA AGREEMENT, WOULD NOT TAKE PART IN GENERAL ELECTIONS UNLESS THEY WERE GUARANTEED TO BE FREE IN THE NORTH AS WELL AS IN THE SOUTH. /J.B. DRAGON.

071855 AFTER AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF AID BY THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO THE DRV ON JULY 7, MOSCOW ALSO CONCLUDED AN AID AGREEMENT WITH HANOI.

071855 THE NATIONAL ARMY BATTLED THE HOA HAO IN HA TIEN.

071855 U.S. OFFICERS STARTED TO TRAIN VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS IN QUANG TRI.

071955 NGO DINH DIEM REFUSED TO ATTEND TALKS WITH DELEGATES FROM THE NORTH ON ELECTIONS TO BE HELD IN 1958. TALKS WERE SCHEDULED BY THE GENEVA TO BEGIN JULY 20, 1955.  
SVA REJECTED THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT'S INVITATION TO DISCUSS ELECTIONS ON THE GROUNDS THAT IN THE NORTH THE PEOPLE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO EXPRESS THEIR WILL FREELY AND THAT FALSIFIED VOTES IN NORTH VIETNAM COULD OVERRULE THE VOTES IN SOUTH VIETNAM. /READER

072955 THE ASST. SEC. DEF. (ISA) REQUESTED A JCS EVALUATION OF THE MAAG-RECOMMENDED 150,000 MAN VNA FOR FY 1955-56. ISA REITERATED FORCE REQUIREMENTS TO MEET INTERNAL NOT EXTERNAL AGGRESSION. /323-1



08 55 THE U.S. COUNTRY TEAM SUBMITTED THE TEAM PLAN FOR TRAINING THE SECURITY FORCES OF SOUTH VIETNAM. /COUNTRY TEAM MESSAGE 933, DISPATCH

08 55 THE FRENCH AGREED TO ABOLISH THE MINISTRY FOR THE ASSOCIATED STATES OF INDOCHINA. ITS FUNCTIONS, MUCH ALTERED BY THE REALIZATION OF INDEPENDENCE, WERE TRANSFERRED TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

08 55 NO AGREEMENT ON FRENCH FORCES STATUS AND WITHDRAWAL WAS REACHED IN NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN FRENCH AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE REPRESENTATIVES IN PARIS.

080955 DIEM'S REFUSAL TO DISCUSS ELECTIONS WITH NORTH VIETNAM INCREASED THE LIKELIHOOD OF AN ATTACK BY THE NORTH. U.S. POLICY IN THIS EVENT WITH RESPECT TO SEATO AND APPLICATION OF FORCES WAS DEVELOPED. /JCS HIST.

080955 GENERAL O'DANIEL PROPOSED U.S. SUPPORT 150,000 FORCE LEVEL IN VIETNAMESE ARMY, PLUS 10,000 TROOPS OF THE SECT ARMIES BY JULY 1, 1956.

081055 AMBASSADOR REINHARDT AND CINCPAC ENDORSED GENERAL O'DANIEL'S FORCE LEVEL. JCS RECOMMENDED IT BE APPROVED. /JCS HIST.

081655 HENRI HOPPENOT, AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE ON EXTRAORDINARY MISSION AND HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC NEAR THE STATE OF VIETNAM PRESENTED HIS LETTERS OF CREDENCE TO PRIME MINISTER DIEM. THIS ACTION TERMINATED THE OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER GENERAL OF FRANCE IN INDOCHINA.

083055 DULLES DECLARED THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS IN AGREEMENT WITH DIEM AND SUPPORTED THE CONTENTION THAT CONDITIONS IN NORTH VIETNAM RULED OUT POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING FREE ELECTIONS. /LANCASTER.

09 55 FATHERLAND FRONT WAS ORGANIZED IN HANOI, FORMERLY WAS LIEN VIET.

090255 JCS AGREED WITH THE TAYLOR ANALYSIS.

090255 DOD CONCURRED IN SECRETARY OF THE ARMY'S DESIGNATION OF SAMUEL T. WILLIAMS TO SUCCEED O'DANIEL AS CHIEF MAAG. /326-1

SEPT 6-29 1955 LT. GEN. BRUCE C. CLARK COMMANDING GENERAL USARPAC VISITED WEST PACIFIC AND S.E. ASIA, REVIEWED THE TRIM ORGANIZATION. /JCS HIST.

090955 JCS ENVISAGED DEFENSE OF S.E. ASIA AS RELYING INITIALLY ON INDIGINOUS FORCES, U.S. AIR AND NAVAL POWER, ARMY MOBILE STRIKE FORCE. JCS HOWEVER FELT SUBVERSION WAS REAL THREAT. NO ADDITIONAL FORCES SHOULD BE SENT TO ASIA UNTIL THAT CHANGED. /JCS TO SEC.DEF. MEMO.

091255 JCS MESSAGE 988351 REQUESTED CINCPAC TO EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS ON PHILIPPINE TRAINING IN COUNTER SUBVERSION FOR VINA.

092055 DIEM OPENED A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BINH XUYEN WITH 22 BATTALIONS.

092155 DIEM ISSUED A STATEMENT THAT THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF A CONFERENCE BETWEEN SOUTH AND NORTH VIETNAM. /LANCASTER.

- 10 55 CINCPAC RECOMMENDED VNA TRAINING IN PHILIPPINES. BOTH JCS AND DOD  
CONCURRED BY NOVEMBER 1955. /323-1.
- 10 55 BINH XUYEN WAS DEFEATED AS AN ORGANIZED ARMED INSURGENT FORCE.
- 10 55 SOUTH VIETNAM RECALLED ITS DELEGATION FROM PARIS, WHICH HAD BEEN TRYING  
TO REACH AN AGREEMENT ON THE STATUS OF THE FRENCH FORCES.
- 101055 WASHINGTON APPROVED THE COUNTRY TEAM PLAN FOR TRAINING THE SECURITY FORCE  
IN SOUTH VIETNAM. /STATE DEPT. MESSAGE 1221.
- 101155 NIE 63, 1-3-55 REPORTED THE STRENGTH OF THE VNA AT 147,000 PLUS 8-10,000  
SECT FORCES IN THE PROCESS OF BEING INTEGRATED. THE GVN WANTED A FORCE  
OF 200,000 WHEREAS THE U.S.-APPROVED FORCE LEVEL WAS 150,000 BY JULY  
1956. THE VNA WAS NOT CONSIDERED CAPABLE OF COUNTERING MAJOR GUERRILLA  
OPERATIONS.  
VIETNAMESE NATIONAL POLICE HAD 4,500 MEN. CIVIL GUARD WAS TO BE ORGANIZED  
FROM PROVINCIAL GUARDS, LOCAL MILITIA AND OTHER ELEMENTS UNDER MINISTER  
OF INTERIOR. ORGANIZATION TO CONTAIN 65,000 MEN THE U.S. TO SUPPORT  
ONLY 25,000. 0212-1ST.  
THE FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS WAS REDUCED TO 45,000 TROOPS.
- 101855 THE REFERENDUM TO BE HELD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN DIEM AND BAO DAI AS ANNOUNCED  
BY DIEM WAS DECLARED ILLEGAL BY BAO DAI.
- 102355 IN A NATIONAL REFERENDUM HELD TO ELECT THE CHIEF OF STATE, NGO DINH DIEM  
RECEIVED 5,721,735 VOTES, AGAINST 63,017 FOR BAO DAI, FORMER EMPEROR  
SINCE MARCH 7, 1949, HEAD OF STATE OF VIETNAM. /J.B.
- 102655 A REPUBLIC WAS PROCLAIMED BY NGO DINH DIEM. HE BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT  
OF SOUTH VIETNAM.
- 102855 CINCPAC DISPATCH 280503A REDESIGNATED MAAG INDOCHINA AS MAAG VIETNAM.  
217155.
- 103155 PRESIDENT DIEM ISSUED HIS FIRST ORDER TO THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES AS  
THEIR SUPREME COMMANDER.
- 11 55 MDAP EQUIPMENT WAS VALUED AT \$508,000,000 ACCORDING TO FRENCH INVENTORY.
- 11 55 REPORT FROM VIETNAM COUNTRY TEAM INDICATED REDUCTION IN FRENCH FORCES  
RESULTED IN LOSS OF CONTROL OF MDAP MATERIALS. COULD NOT SUPPLY FORCES  
IN THE EVENT OF CONTINGENCY BY MID-1956. FRENCH WERE ALSO REMOVING  
GOOD EQUIPMENT. /JCS HIST.
- 11 55 CIVIL GUARD TRANSFERRED BY DIEM FROM MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO PRESIDENCY.
- 11 55 GENERAL S.T. WILLIAMS ARRIVES IN SAIGON.
- 110155 JCS APPROVED ADMIRAL STUMP'S VIEWS AND AUTHORIZED CINCPAC TO BUDGET AND  
PLAN THE PROGRAM.
- 113055 PROGRAM FOR REDISTRIBUTION OF MDAP EQUIPMENT REACHED THE CRITICAL STAGE.



12 55 TRIM ACCOMPLISHED LITTLE TRAINING DURING 1955, BECAUSE OF CONTINUED EMPLOYMENT OF THE VNA IN OPERATIONS AGAINST THE SECTS AND THE LACK OF INTEREST BY THE FRENCH. /JCS HIST.

12 55 HOA HAO, BINH XUYEN AND CAO DAI WERE NO LONGER AN ORGANIZED THREAT TO THE GOVERNMENT.

120655 THE CNO (AS JCS EXECUTIVE AGENT) REPORTED TRAINING HAD PROGRESSED BUT CRITICAL STAGE HAD BEEN REACHED. STEPS HAD TO BE TAKEN TO RETAIN THE TEMPO OF MAAG.

120855 VNA ARMY, DEPLOYED THROUGHOUT SOUTH VIETNAM, HAD BEEN ABLE TO THWART VIETMINH AND SECTS. LATE 1955 THE VNA GENERAL STAFF BEGAN TO REGROUP THE ARMY INTO DIVISIONS TO TRAIN. ADDITIONAL SECURITY FORCES WERE NEEDED TO FILL THE VOID CREATED BY THE WITHDRAWING ARMY UNITS. /JCS HIST.

121255 THE U.S. CONSULATE IN HANOI WAS CLOSED.

121255 JCS REQUESTED OSD TO ASK NSC TO RECONSIDER ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL FOR VIETNAM.

121355 SEC.DEF., WILSON TO SECRETARY OF STATE, DULLES MEMO DISCUSSING GENEVA AGREEMENT, ARTICLE 16 RELATIVE TO EXPANDED MAAG TO HANDLE IDAP EQUIPMENT. JCS, CINCPAC, DOD FELT THAT ARTICLE 16 AND ITS RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE DID NOT APPLY TO U.S. AID SVN SINCE NEITHER HAD SIGNED.

121355 A COMMITTEE CHAIRED BY LT. COL. EVANS MET IN PLANS SECTION, MAAG, TO PLAN THE PREPARATION OF TWO NEW TD'S (TERM) FOR MAAG. THE FIRST PLAN WAS TO ACCOMPLISH PRESENT MISSION AND THE SECOND TO ACCOMPLISH A MISSION TO BEGIN JULY 1, 1956.

121655 ALLEN DULLES WROTE JOHN FOSTER DULLES THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO CIA OPERATIONS THAT RESTRICTIONS ON THE NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL BE RELAXED SO THAT AGENCY WOULD BE ASSURED OF SUFFICIENT SLOTS UNDER MILITARY COVER TO DO ITS JOB. /335-1.

122055 THE NEW PLANS (TD) BEING DEVELOPED AT MAAG-VIETNAM WERE COMPLETED.

122755 LT. COL. HANELIN REPORTED TO CHIEF, MAAG ON WASHINGTON ACTION ON MAAG-VIETNAM PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS.

122755 GENERAL O'DANIEL REPORTED THAT MR. ROBERTSON, DEPT. OF STATE, STATED THAT STATE MIGHT REACT FAVORABLY TO AN INCREASE OVER THE AUTHORIZED 342

EARLY 1956 CONTROVERSY EXISTED BETWEEN FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE OVER ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRIM PROGRAM. IT FUNCTIONED WITH SOME U.S. ADVISORS BUT WAS PREDOMINATELY STAFFED WITH FRENCH INSTRUCTORS. /WID 17-56.

01 56 SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY UNITS OCCUPIED TAY NINH, PRINCIPAL CAO DAI POLITICAL CENTER, LEADING TO THE BREAK UP OF THE ORGANIZED CAO DAI ARMED INSURGENCY. AGREEMENT WITH CAO DAI LEADERS ON FEBRUARY 28 LEGALIZED CAO DAI RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND FORBODE ITS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AS RELIGIOUS SECT.

011156 CNO ASKED CINCPAC FOR MINIMUM U.S. PERSONNEL REQUIRED TO REPLACE FRENCH.

011356 CHIEF-MAAG REPORTED TO CINCPAC THAT SECRETARY QUANLES SUGGESTED THAT FRENCH OR VIETNAMESE CIVILIAN TECHNICIANS BE HIRED TO REPLACE THE WITHDRAWING FRENCH FORCES. THIS WAS NOT POLITICALLY ACCEPTABLE TO VIETNAMESE.

011456 THE FRENCH ANNOUNCED PLANS TO RETAIN 230 PERSONNEL AS ADVISORS TO VNAF PLUS 130 OF THEIR PERSONNEL TO SERVE AS A TRAINING CENTER FOR F-8-F TRAINING AND TO RETAIN EXCLUSIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF VNAF AND NAVY THRU 1956.

011456 CHIEF-MAAG INFORMED CINCPAC THAT MAAG VIETNAM WAS DEVELOPING A NEW TD ANTICIPATION OF A RAISE IN PERSONNEL CEILING.

011456 MAAG CABLE TO CINCPAC STATED THEIR SECOND PLAN WOULD PROVIDE FOR ADVICE DOWN TO BATTALION LEVEL AND WOULD THUS REQUIRE 1049 U.S. PERSONNEL AS AGAINST PRESENT 342 AUTHORIZED.

011956 CHIEF-MAAG INFORMED CINCPAC THAT THE FIRST PLAN CALLED FOR 636 U.S. MILITARY.

012156 A MESSAGE FROM CHIEF, MAAG, VIETNAM TO CINCPAC, DEPTAR, CNO, AND DEPTA STATED THAT THE CONTINUED WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH PRESENTED A PROBLEM IN THE DISPOSAL OF EXCESS EQUIPMENT. HELP ASKED IN THE SPEED-UP OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSING OF DECLARATIONS AND SHIPPING INSTRUCTIONS.

012556 MEMO TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FROM ASD STATED THAT REPORT OF INTERAGENCY COSTING TEAM THAT HAD RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A 5 WEEK MISSION TO VIETNAM INDICATED 150-200 MORE WERE NEEDED AT MAAG FOR LOGISTIC PURPOSES.

012656 PRES. DIEM FORMALLY ASKED FOR AN INCREASE IN U.S. ADVISORS. IT WAS THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION THAT REPLACING DEPARTING FRENCH FORCES WITH U.S. FORCES WOULD NOT VIOLATE EITHER THE SPIRIT NOR THE LETTER OF THE GENEVA ACCORDS.

012756 CINCPAC INFORMED CNO THAT WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH AND INABILITY OF FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE TO COMPROMISE REQUIRED EXPEDITING AUGMENTATION PLANS DECISION TO RAISE 342 CEILING WAS MADE.

013156 A JOINT INVENTORY OF MDAP EQUIPMENT WAS PROPOSED TO FRENCH.

013156 SEC.DEF. C.E. WILSON WROTE SEC.STATE DULLES OUTLINING PROBLEMS OF MAAG VIETNAM RE SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL TO HANDLE LOGISTICS PROBLEMS.

02 56 THE GOVERNMENT GAINED OCCUPATION OF CAO DAI POSTS IN TAY NINH AND INTEGRATION OF MOST OF GENERAL PHUONG'S FORCES. /WID 9-56.

02 56 FEC STRENGTH DOWN TO 15,000.



- 020256 DULLES DECIDED PROTECTION OF MDAP EQUIPMENT WARRANTED AN INCREASE IN PERSONNEL AND THEREFORE AUTHORIZED A GROUP OF 350 FOR THE TEMPORARY EQUIPMENT RECOVERY MISSION TO BE SENT TO VIETNAM. THE MISSION WAS TO PREVENT A GREATER DOLLAR LOSS THROUGH MISUSE OR WASTE OF U.S. PROVIDED MATERIEL.
- 020356 SEC. OF STATE DULLES DECIDED THAT THE TERM OPERATION SHOULD BE USED TO IMPLEMENT HIS DECISION TO EXPLORE WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS A MEANS OF RECOVERING U.S. EQUIPMENT. /1-33.
- 021256 FOLLOWING SECRET NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, TRAN VAN SOAI, THE LEADER OF AN IMPORTANT HAO HAO FACTION REJOINED THE VIETNAM ARMY. BA CUT, ANOTHER PRINCIPAL HAO HAO LEADER, WAS CAPTURED ON APRIL 13, LEADING TO THE BREAKUP OF ORGANIZED HAO HAO ARMED INSURGENCY. /WID 9-59.
- 021356 A MESSAGE FROM AMBASSADOR TO SECRETARY OF STATE STATED THAT TERM SHOULD BE PRESENTED SOLELY AS AN EQUIPMENT RECOVERY MISSION AND NOT AS A TRAINING MISSION.
- 022156 FRANCE AGREED TO WITHDRAW ITS REMAINING FORCES FROM SOUTH VIETNAM.
- 03 56 THE FREE VIETNAMESE INTERNAL SECURITY AGENCY WAS OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED SELF DEFENSE CORPS. /WID 13-56.
- 03 56 DIEM DEMANDED THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE FEC FROM VIETNAM.
- 030956 DIEM HELD ANOTHER CONFERENCE WITH NAVAL COMMANDER LE QUANG MY REGARDING THE COMMUNIST OCCUPATION OF BOISER ISLAND OF THE PARACEL GROUP. PURPOSE OF CONFERENCE APPARENTLY TO FORMULATE POLICY PRIOR TO TALKS WITH FRENCH TO COMMENCE MARCH 10. NO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST THE PARACELS WAS TAKEN. /WID 10-56.
- 031456 U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN FOSTER DULLES VISITED SOUTH VIETNAM.
- 031556 FIRST PHASE OF FRANCO-VIETNAMESE TALKS ENDED WITH THE VIETNAMESE INSISTING UPON COMPLETE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL FROM ALL BASES IN VIETNAM. DIFFICULTY IN TALKS CENTERED AROUND THE FRENCH NAVAL ARSENAL IN SAIGON. ITS REPAIR FACILITIES WERE IMPORTANT TO THE VIETNAM NAVY. THE FRENCH ALSO NEEDED THE REPAIR FACILITIES FOR ITS NAVY AND WANTED EITHER PRIORITY REPAIR SERVICE FOR FRENCH SHIPS AT THE ARSENAL OR THE NON-MDAP EQUIPMENT TO SET UP SUCH A FACILITY WOULD HAVE TO BE WITHDRAWN AND MOVED ELSEWHERE. MUCH OF THE NON-MDAP EQUIPMENT THERE WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO THE FRENCH BY THE U.S. /WID 10-56.
- 031656 AGREEMENT WAS REACHED BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CAO DAI SECT WHICH RELEGATED THE LATTER TO A PURELY RELIGIOUS ROLE. A COROLLARY THAT AGREEMENT WAS THAT ALL THE CAO DAI ARMED DISSIDENTS, ESTIMATED MAXIMUM 4,000, HAVE CAPITULATED WITH THEIR ARMS AND AMMUNITION. PROCESSING OF THE SURRENDEREES STARTED AROUND MARCH 13, 1956. BA CUT REMAINED AN OPPONENT OF THE GOVERNMENT. /WID 10-56.
- 032256 AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED BY FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE STIPULATING THE WITHDRAWAL OF FEC BY JUNE 30, 1956.

04 56 TERM WAS PRESENTED TO THE ICC FOR APPROVAL. NEITHER APPROVAL NOR DISAPPROVAL WAS RECEIVED SO THE PROJECT PROCEEDED IN JUNE. /WID

040656 VIETNAM GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE TO COOPERATE WITH ICC AND REITERATED ITS POSITION OF SUPPORTING VIETNAM-WIDE ELECTIONS AT SUCH TIME AS CONDITIONS IN COMMUNIST NORTH VIETNAM PERMITTED GENUINELY FREE VOTING.

040856 TRIM MISSION ENDED. REDESIGNATED COMBAT AND TRAINING ORGANIZATION.

041056 THE LAST ELEMENTS OF FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS LEFT SAIGON.

041256 DIRECTIVE FROM CNO TO COFSA+COFSAF ISSUED IMPLEMENTING THE TERM PROGRAM. IN IT THE CNO STATED THAT TERM SHOULD APPEAR TO BE SEPARATE ORGANIZATION FROM MAAG.  
CHIEF OF TERM SHOULD BE A SENIOR COLONEL OR BRIG. GEN. NOT PRESENTLY APPEARING ON MAAG'S ROSTER.

042356 THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND WAS INACTIVATED. /NIE 245 1ST N.

042556 AT THE REQUEST OF THE GVN MOST OF THE FEC WERE WITHDRAWN FROM INDOCHINA.

042856 THE DEPARTURE FROM SAIGON OF GENERAL JACUOT, COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY CORPS, MARKED THE DISSOLUTION OF THE FRENCH HIGH COMMAND IN VIETNAM. /PROGRESS REPT. NSC 5405/5428/5

042856 ARVN TRAINING BECAME THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAAG.

05 56 THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE VISITED VIETNAM AND URGED MORE SUPPORT FOR THE CIVIL GUARD.

EARLY MAY 1956 AGREEMENT HAD NOT YET BEEN REACHED CONCERNING THE STATUS OF SAIGON NAVAL ARSENAL RELATIVE TO THE FRENCH WITHDRAWAL. /WID 19-56

050156 ROBERT D. MURPHY, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE WROTE WILSON THAT TERM PERSONNEL SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A TRAINING FORCE, BUT THEY SHOULD BE ADMINISTRATIVELY SUPERVISED BY MAAG NOT EMBASSY.

051556 VNA STRENGTH WAS 156,000.

051556 DEADLINE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF ALL FRENCH NAVAL PERSONNEL (EXCEPT FOR SMALL LIQUIDATING DETACHMENTS). TRANSFER OF CONTROL OF THE ARSENAL TO THE VIETNAMESE WAS TO BE MADE. /WID 10-56.

052356 DOD OFFICIALLY ESTABLISHED THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TERM. /JCS HIST.

06 56 GVN ESTIMATED VIETMINH ACTIVE STRENGTH AT 1,360 OUT OF 6-8,000 HOSTILE FORCE. U.S. PUT STRENGTH AT 8-10,000 IN SKELETON UNITS.

06 56 THE GVN FORMALLY REQUESTED AUGMENTATION OF MAAG. A SPECIAL DETACHMENT OF 350 MEN WAS ORGANIZED AND CHARGED WITH RECOVERING AND EXPORTING LARGE QUANTITIES OF U.S. WAR MATERIEL. A COLLATERAL PURPOSE WAS TO INCREASE THE LOGISTICAL CAPABILITIES OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY. THE PROJECT WAS TERM. /WID 13-57.



060156 AFTER JUNE 1, 1956, THE DEADLINE FOR WITHDRAWAL OR TURNOVER TO THE VIETNAMESE OF AIR FORCE EQUIPMENT, THE FRENCH WERE COMPLETELY PHASED OUT OF THE VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE. ONLY A FEW FRENCH INSTRUCTORS REMAINED IN SOUTH VIETNAM. /WID 17-56.

060156 U.S. TEMPORARY EQUIPMENT RECOVERY MISSION (TERM) ACTIVATED.

060756 ADMIRAL RADFORD BRIEFED THE NSC ON THE STRATEGY FOR THE DEFENSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM WHICH REPEATED THE PLANS SET FORTH IN FEBRUARY AND SEPTEMBER.

063056 THE VNA HAD 142,000 MEN IN 4 FIELD DIVISIONS AND 6 LIGHT DIVISIONS AND 13 TERRITORIAL REGIMENTS, PLUS SERVICE SUPPORT UNITS. THIS WAS APPROVED STRENGTH. /WID 20-56.

07 56 THE CRUCIAL MONTH DURING WHICH THE ELECTIONS TO UNIFY VIETNAM SHOULD HAVE BEEN HELD AS PROVIDED IN THE GENEVA AGREEMENT PASSED WITHOUT INCIDENT. /J.B.

07 56 CIVIL GUARD 51,000 STRONG, OPERATED IN THREE MILITARY REGIONS.

070656 VICE PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON VISITED SOUTH VIETNAM.

070756 ADMIRAL RADFORD BRIEFED THE NSC ON CONCEPT DELINEATED IN 5612/1.

071156 JCS DIRECTED CINCPAC TO PREPARE A CONTINGENCY PLAN BASED ON THE QUICK RESPONSE STRATEGY AS SET FORTH BY ADMIRAL RADFORD IN THE JUNE 7, 1956 BRIEFING TO NSC, FOR DEFENSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

071356 BA CUT EXECUTED. /WID 32-56.

071756 COMMUNIST ARMED STRENGTH IN THE SOUTH ESTIMATED AT 5-10,000 1955-56, PROBABLY ABOUT 8,000 WITH 5,000 ORGANIZED IN SKELETON COMPANIES. /247 NIE 1ST.

071756 THE VNA HAD THE APPROXIMATELY 145,000 TROOPS. /NIE.

071756 NIE 63-56 STATED WASHINGTON'S CONCEPT OF THE CIVIL GUARD AND THE SELF-DEFENSE CORPS. THE GVN ORGANIZED THE CIVIL GUARD TO RELIEVE THE VNA'S MANY STATIC INTERNAL SECURITY DUTIES. THE 48,000 MEN IN LIGHTLY ARMED MOBILE COMPANIES WERE TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER, COLLECT INTELLIGENCE, CONDUCT COUNTER-SUBVERSION OPERATIONS IN PROVINCES PACIFIED BY THE V. THE 60,000 MAN SELF-DEFENSE CORPS WAS TO MAINTAIN VILLAGE SECURITY.

072056 THE ALL-VIETNAMESE ELECTION AS PROVIDED IN 1954 GENEVA DECLARATION FAILED TO TAKE PLACE. /READER.

072156 FRENCH ACCDED TO SOUTH VIETNAM'S REQUEST THAT FRENCH BE REPRESENTED BY AN AMBASSADOR RATHER THAN A HIGH COMMISSIONER.

073056 A VIETNAMESE LIAISON MISSION TO THE ICC WAS ESTABLISHED PREPARATORY TO THE TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS FROM THE FRENCH LIAISON MISSION. /READER.

08 56 ESTIMATES OF VIETMINH IN SVN WERE 5,000-7,000. /WID 32-56.

083156 TERM AT FULL STRENGTH OF 350.

090556 THERE WAS A CHANGE IN POLICY FROM TRAINING THE VIETNAMESE ARMY FROM INTERNAL SECURITY ALONE TO BOTH A MISSION OF INTERNAL SECURITY AND LIMITED INITIAL RESISTANCE. OCMH.

091656 U.S. TRAINING PROGRAM OF ARVN WENT INTO EFFECT.

091956 FRENCH AIR FORCE OFFICIALLY TRANSFERRED THE TOURANE AIR BASE TO VIETNAMESE CONTROL.

100156 OPLAN 46-56 DEFENSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM PREPARED BY CINCPAC.

102456 STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT EMPHASIZED THAT THE SUBVERSION-POLITICAL THREAT TO SOUTH VIETNAM WAS MORE LIKELY TO BE A REAL DANGER THAN OVERT AGGRESSION.

110156 THE CHIEF OF MAAG PROPOSED SUPPORTING THE CIVIL GUARD AT A STRENGTH OF 59,160 AND A SELF DEFENSE CORPS OF 60,000. OCMH.

12 56 COUNTRY TEAM JUDGED THE VNA CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SECURITY. /JCS HIST.

01 57 DIEM ASKED THE U.S. TO INCREASE HIS FORCE TO 200,000. THIS WAS REFUSED.

010357 THE ICC REPORTED THAT BETWEEN DECEMBER 1955 AND AUGUST 1956 NEITHER NORTH OR SOUTH VIETNAM HAD BEEN FULFILLING ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE 1954 ARMISTICE AGREEMENT.

021557 THE TWO PACIFICATION OPERATIONS TRUONG TAN BUU AND THOAI NGOC HAU TERMINATED. THE VN MILITARY FELT THAT THE ARMY SHOULD PERFORM ONLY MILITARY FUNCTIONS WHICH DID NOT INTERFERE WITH NORMAL TRAINING. HOWEVER DIEM WANTED THE TWO OPERATIONS TO BE CONTINUED AS PART OF THE PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS ROUTINE FUNCTIONS. BUU AND HAU HAD BEEN VAST MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS EMPLOYING MEN FROM THE ARMED CIVIL GUARD, AND CIVIL ACTION COMMITTEES WITH THE PURPOSE TO BRING ALL UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND TO PUBLICIZE AND POPULARIZE THE DIEM GOVERNMENT. /WID 15-57.

03 57 THE GOVERNMENT OF PRESIDENT DIEM ANNOUNCED A SERIES OF REGULATIONS INTENDED TO ENCOURAGE FOREIGN INVESTMENTS. /J.B.

031957 OPLAN 46-56 DEFENSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM WAS APPROVED BY JCS.

041657 ELBRIDGE DUBROW PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS AS AMBASSADOR OF THE U.S. TO SOUTH VIETNAM.

050257 PRES. DIEM REINSTITUTED A DRAFT LAW. /JCS HIST.

050457 ARVN'S FIRST MAJOR TACTICAL CONTROL HEADQUARTERS WAS ESTABLISHED, I CO /JCS HIST.

050557 PRESIDENT DIEM VISITED THE U.S.

050957 PRESIDENT DIEM ADDRESSED A JOINT ASSEMBLY OF CONGRESS.



051057 IN A MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT DIEM AND DEPUTY SECRETARY QUARLES, DIEM PUT FORTH HIS PLAN TO MOVE THE CIVIL GUARD INTO HIGH PLATEAU AREAS TO FILL THE VACUUM THERE. HE ALSO PUT FORTH THE NEW ARMY REORGANIZATION. HE WANTED THE SAME NUMBER OF DIVISIONS BUT WITH A STRENGTH INCREASE UP TO 10,000 WHICH REQUIRED A TOTAL FORCE INCREASE OF 20,000.

051157 PRESIDENT EISENHOWER AND PRESIDENT DIEM DECLARED THAT BOTH COUNTRIES WOULD WORK TOWARD A PEACEFUL UNIFICATION OF VIETNAM (JOINT COMMUNIQUE).

051157 ACCORDING TO EISENHOWER AND DIEM THE CHIEF DANGER TO SOUTH VIETNAM WAS THE LARGE BUILDUP OF MILITARY FORCES IN NORTH VIETNAM.

051757 NORTH VIETNAMESE LIAISON MISSION TO THE ICC WAS WITHDRAWN FROM SAIGON AT THE REQUEST OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

052457 ASST. SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, GVN, SUBMITTED A WRITTEN REQUEST TO CHIEF-M FOR U.S. ADVISOR ASSISTANCE FOR THE VIETNAM AIR FORCE AND NAVY.

052857 NEW YORK STATE POLICE INSPECTOR UPDIKE WAS ASKED TO SET UP THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE POLICE FORCE.

053157 FRENCH PARTICIPATION IN THE TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE, NAVY, AND AT THE VIETNAMESE COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE TERMINATED. FRENCH LEGAL INSTRUCTORS TO GENDARMERIE AND CIVIL GUARD STILL REMAINED.

06 57 THE FRENCH NAVAL AND AIR FORCE TRAINING MISSION WAS WITHDRAWN FROM SOUTH VIETNAM.

061357 THREE NEW YORK STATE POLICEMEN WERE ASSIGNED TO HELP ORGANIZE THE POLICE IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

07 57 GVN REQUESTED \$60 MILLION FOR HEAVY EQUIPMENT FOR THE CIVIL GUARD. MA AND MSU PROPOSED \$14-18 MILLION. /JCS HIST.

07 57 AN ICA SURVEY REPORT ON VIETNAM INDICATED THAT COMMODITY ASSISTANCE FUNDING TO THE INTERNAL SECURITY PROGRAM WAS TO END IN 1958. /159-1

07 57 SINCE THE ARVN'S ANTI-DISSIDENT CAMPAIGNS HAD ACHIEVED SUCH SUCCESS, THE SOUTH VIETNAM GOVERNMENT DIVERTED MOST OF THE MILITARY TO TRAINING FOR CLASSICAL WARFARE AS A NECESSITY FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE AGAINST POSSIBLE DRV AGGRESSION. /WID 30-58.

09 57 ALL 10 ARVN DIVISIONS HAD COMPLETED BASIC TRAINING. 7 DIVISIONS HAD FINISHED THIRD LEVEL TRAINING.

102257 U.S. PERSONNEL WERE INJURED IN SAIGON IN THE BOMBING OF INSTALLATIONS THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP AND OF THE U.S. INFORMATION SERVICE.

11 57 INTELLIGENCE REPORTS DEPICTED VIETCONG EFFORTS AS ONE OF SURVIVAL DURING JULY 1956 - JULY 1957. /JCS HIST.

120957 SOUTH VIETNAM EX-DIRECTOR OF POLICE NGUYEN VAN TON WAS SENTENCED FOR AIDING THE REBEL ELEMENTS.

58 THE VIETNAMESE ARMY WAS REORGANIZED. FIELD AND LIGHT DIVISIONS WERE CONVERTED TO 7 IMPROVED DIVISIONS. (LATE 1958-SEPT. 1959)

010458 LARGE COMMUNIST GUERRILLA BAND ATTACKED A PLANTATION NORTH OF SAIGON, REFLECTING STEADY INCREASE IN COMMUNIST ARMED ACTIVITY IN SOUTH VIETNAM SINCE MID-1957.

032758 PERMANENT SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF NATIONAL DEFENSE UNDER THE PRESIDENCY ESTABLISHED.

04 58 THROUGH INTENSIVE RECRUITING IN THE SOUTH, THE NORTH VIETNAM GUERRILLA STRENGTH IN THE SOUTH ROSE TO ABOUT 2,100. /WID 51-58.

05 58 ORGANIZED COMMUNISTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM WERE ESTIMATED AT 1,140-1,400. /WID 22-58.

07 58 THE SVN GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO ANNIHILATE VIETCONG SUFFERED FROM RELYING TOO HEAVILY ON THE INEFFICIENT PARAMILITARY FORCES INSTEAD OF THE ARMY TO PUR DOWN ARMED INSURGENCY. /WID 30-58.

07 58 GENERAL PHAM XUAN CHIEU WAS THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR ARVN. /WID

09 58 MAAG REPORTED U.S. PERSONNEL WERE VC TARGETS.

091058 FRANCE AND SOUTH VIETNAM SIGNED AN AGREEMENT UNDER WHICH FRANCE PROVIDED AID FOR THE VIETNAM GOVERNMENT'S AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAM -- 1,490

12 58 VIETNAMESE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION STRENGTH OF 6,500, INCLUDING 2,500 PERMANENT AGENTS. /WID 52-58.

120858 PRESIDENT EISENHOWER APPROVED A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL ACTION WHICH AMONG OTHER ITEMS EMPHASIZED POLICE AND CONSTABULARY TYPE FORCES FOR INTERNAL SECURITY PURPOSES IN LIEU OF LARGER INDIGENOUS MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS.

59 IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT THERE WERE BETWEEN 5,000--12,000 COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS ACTIVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN 1959.

01 59 JCS REPORTED ARVN WAS READY TO FULFILL THE MISSION THE U.S. HAD SET /JCS HIST.

01 59 GVN AGREED TO TRANSFER THE CIVIL GUARD TO THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR. AID PROGRAM TO THE CIVIL GUARD WAS THEN RESUMED. /JCS HIST.

010759 30,000 POLICE AND CIVIL GUARDSMEN HAD BEEN LOCALLY TRAINED IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND TECHNICAL TRAINING COURSES. MORE TRAINING IN ADMINISTRATION AND COMMAND FUNCTIONS WAS BEING REQUESTED.



- 010759 NSC 5809 REPORTED THAT THE U.S. EMBASSY AND THE GVN HAD REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON TRAINING AND EQUIPPING A CIVIL GUARD FORCE OF 32,000. THE WAS IN WASHINGTON FOR APPROVAL. THE QUESTION BEING ASKED WAS WHETHER THIS SITUATION REQUIRED IMPROVEMENT IN THE CIVIL GUARD OR WHETHER OTHER EXISTING VIETNAMESE SECURITY FORCES COULD ADEQUATELY DEAL WITH THE SITUATION.
- 011259 A NORTH-SOUTH VIETNAM MEETING WAS HELD TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS CONCERNING DEMILITARIZED ZONE. THE OPPOSING PARTIES PREPARED TO DISCUSS SPECIFIC LOW-LEVEL MATTERS OF MUTUAL CONCERN. ARRANGED BY ICC. /WID 39-58.
- 032959 VNAF FLEW ITS FIRST MISSION AGAINST A VC TARGET. /SAIGON-STATE MSG 4-457. /JCS HIST.
- 04 59 DIEM ENCOURAGED TERRORIST ACTIVITY REPORTING.
- 040959 DURBROW-DIEM-WILLIAMS CONFERENCE ON WORSENING INTERNAL SECURITY SITUATION.
- 050659 EMBASSY DID NOT BELIEVE DIEM'S STORY THAT SECURITY WAS AT ITS WORST SINCE 1955. U.S. SKEPTICISM RE THREAT TO SVN CONTINUED THROUGH 1959. S-STATE 2345 6MAY59.
- 052659 THE ICC STATED TERM SHOULD END ACTIVITIES BY MID-1959.
- 052659 2,000 GUERRILLAS WERE REPORTED IN SVN. THOUSANDS MORE WERE INACTIVE. CIVIL GUARD STRENGTH = 47,000. VNA = 136,000 REGULARS. INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES WERE NOT CONSIDERED CAPABLE OF ERADICATING A DRV SUPPORTED GUERRILLA FORCE. VNA WILL HAVE TO BE DIVERTED TO THIS TASK. /249-
- 052959 U.S. ADVISORS WERE AT REGIMENTAL, SEPARATE ARTILLERY, ARMOR AND MARINE BATTALION LEVEL.
- 052959 USOM PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION BEGAN RETRAINING AND RE-EQUIPPING CIVIL GUARD. /JCS HIST.
- 063059 THE MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY POLICE ADVISORY GROUP LEFT VIETNAM. USOM PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION TOOK OVER TRAINING RESPONSIBILITY. THEY OBTAINED NO RESOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE CIVIL GUARD DURING THE NEXT TWO YEARS. /JCS HIST.
- 070859 COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS ATTACKED THE VIETNAMESE MILITARY BASE AT BIEN HOA TWO U.S. MAAG PERSONNEL WERE KILLED AND ONE WAS WOUNDED.
- 083059 SECOND NATIONAL ELECTIONS GAVE THE NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT AND OTHER PRO-GOVERNMENT POLITICAL PARTIES ALL SEATS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN SOUTH VIETNAM. NO OPPOSITION CANDIDATES WERE ALLOWED TO TAKE THEIR SEATS.
- 09 59 DIEM ESTIMATED THAT THERE WERE 1000 VC REGULARS.
- 09 59 THE ARVN FRENCH STYLE 4 FIELD AND 6 LIGHT DIVISIONS CONVERTED TO 7 U.S. TYPE 10,000 MAN DIVISIONS. /JCS HIST.

09 59 JCS PAPER TO NSC URGED U.S. TO BACK PROGRAMS NOT PERSONALITIES.

103059 SPOKESMAN OF THE VIETNAMESE ARMY DISCLOSES THAT A CAMPAIGN AGAINST COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS IN THE COUNTRY'S SOUTHERNMOST REGION, THE CAMA PENINSULA, RESULTED IN HEAVY GUERRILLA LOSSES.

12 59 OSD DIRECTED CINCPAC TO PREPARE A NEW JOINT DISTRIBUTION TABLE REFLECTING TERM PHASE OUT. /ITEM 56.

12 59 FIRST USE OF HELICOPTERS TO MOVE TROOPS. /SAIGON TO STATE 2061 1/3

020160 GVN DIRECTIVE ISSUED ORDERING CONCENTRATION ON ANTI-GUERRILLA TRAINING TACTICS.

021860 AMBASSADOR DURBROW TOLD CINCPAC CIVIL GUARD ANTI-GUERRILLA TRAINING WAS URGENT. CINCPAC HELD OUT FOR MAAG/TERM RESOLUTION RE ICC. /JCS HIST.

03 60 FIRST AGROVILLE ESTABLISHED IN PHONG DINH PROVINCE.

032460 CHIEF OF STAFF ARMY TOLD THE JCS THAT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN VIETNAM HAD BADLY DETERIORATED AND THAT DIEM CONSIDERED THAT VIETNAM WAS IN ALL OUT WAR WITH THE VIETCONG.

04 60 VIETCONG STRENGTH 4,000.

031760 NORTH VIETNAM PROTESTED TO THE CHAIRMEN OF THE 1954 GENEVA CONFERENCE (BRITAIN AND THE USSR) THE FORMIDABLE INCREASE OF PERSONNEL IN THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND ACCUSED THE U.S. OF TURNING SOUTH VIETNAM INTO A U.S. MILITARY BASE FOR THE PREPARATION OF A NEW WAR.

043060 AN OPPOSITION GROUP OF 18, CALLING THEMSELVES THE COMMITTEE FOR PROGRESS AND LIBERTY, SENT A LETTER TO PRES. DIEM DEMANDING DRASTIC ECONOMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND MILITARY REFORMS.

050560 U.S. ANNOUNCED THAT AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM, THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND ADVISORY GROUP WAS TO BE INCREASED BY THE END OF THE YEAR FROM 327 TO 685 MEMBERS.

052060 THE SOVIET UNION PROPOSED TO THE UNITED KINGDOM THAT THE TWO GOVERNMENTS AS CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, SHOULD APPEAL TO THE U.S. TO REFRAIN FROM INCREASING THE NUMBERS OF ITS MILITARY ADVISORS (MAAG) SOUTH VIETNAM AND ALSO TO CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWING MAAG SOUTH VIETNAM. THEIR PRESENCE IN SOUTH VIETNAM CONTRADICTED THE SP OF THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS. THE AIM WAS TO LIQUIDATE ONE OF THE SOURCES OF UREST AND OF STRENGTHENING PEACE IN INDOCHINA.

06 60 COMMUNIST GUERRILLA ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM INCREASED. (JUNE-OCTOBER)

060160 MAJ.GEN. LIONEL T. MC GARR WAS APPOINTED THE HEAD OF THE U.S. MAAG.

060660 COUNTER-INSURGENCY TRAINING PROGRAM UNDER MAAG FOR THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES WAS STARTED.



063060 THERE WERE ONLY 25 MSU ADVISORS IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

101260 SEC.DEF. TOLD THE JCS THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE CIVIL GUARD SHOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO THE MAAG PROMPTLY AND THAT THE CIVIL GUARD SHOULD BE PUT IN THE VIETNAMESE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, RATHER THAN IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.

122960 CIVIL GUARD WAS TRANSFERRED TO DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FROM MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AT MAAG'S REQUEST. /JCS HIST.

01 61 THE FIRST INCREMENT OF CIVIL GUARD BEGAN TRAINING UNDER THE MAAG.

013061 PRES. KENNEDY AUTHORIZED \$29,400,000 TO EXPAND THE VIETNAM ARMED FORCES TO 170,000 PLUS \$12,700,000 FOR THE CIVIL GUARD.

032861 MESSAGE FROM TRAPNELL TO JCS INDICATED FAILURE OF CG AND VNA TO COPE WITH VIETCONG. RECOMMENDED U.S. SUPPORT FULL 68,000 CIVIL GUARD FORCE.

040361 U.S.-VIETNAMESE TREATY OF AMITY AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS WAS SIGNED IN SAIGON. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RATIFIED THE TREATY ON JUNE 14.

040461 PRESIDENT DIEM APPEALED TO THE ICC TO MAKE AN IMMEDIATE AND ENERGETIC INVESTIGATION OF GROWING TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION THROUGHOUT SOUTH VIETNAM.

040961 PRESIDENT DIEM AND VICE PRESIDENT THO WERE ELECTED BY AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY IN THE VIETNAM PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

042961 PRESIDENT KENNEDY AUTHORIZED MAP SUPPORT FOR ALL 69,000 CIVIL GUARD. MAAG VIETNAM WAS DIRECTED TO SUPPORT AND ADVISE SDC. MAAG STRENGTH TO BE INCREASED AS NEEDED.

05 61 MAAG PERSONNEL IN SOUTH VIETNAM NUMBERED 685. ABOUT HALF WERE AIRBORNE COMMANDOS.

050561 PRES. KENNEDY DECLARED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT CONSIDERATION WAS BEING GIVEN TO THE USE OF U.S. FORCES, IF NECESSARY, TO HELP SOUTH VIETNAM RESIST COMMUNIST PRESSURES. HE DECLARED THAT THIS WOULD BE ONE OF THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED DURING THE FORTHCOMING VISIT OF VICE PRESIDENT JOHNSON IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

051161 U.S. VICE PRESIDENT JOHNSON WAS IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

051361 WHILE JOHNSON WAS IN VIETNAM A JOINT COMMUNIQUE DECLARED THAT ADDITIONAL U.S. MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID WOULD BE GIVEN TO HELP SOUTH VIETNAM IN ITS FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNIST GUERRILLA FORCES.

06 61 IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT THERE WERE BETWEEN 7,000-15,000 COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

06 61 LOCAL MILITIAMEN IN SOUTH VIETNAM NUMBERED 50,000, SAME AS IN 1959.

060961 DIEM ASKED SUPPORT FOR AN INCREASE IN THE VIETNAMESE ARMY TO A FORCE OF 270,000.

080261 PRESIDENT KENNEDY DECLARED THAT THE U.S. WOULD DO ALL IT COULD TO SAVE SOUTH VIETNAM FROM COMMUNISM.

080461 PRES. KENNEDY AUTHORIZED AN INCREASE IN THE VIETNAMESE ARMY TO 200,000.

081561 VNA - 150,000, CIVIL GUARD - 60,000, SELF DEFENSE CORPS - 45,000, VIETCONG - 12,000. /254 NIE.

090161 THERE WAS A SERIES OF ATTACKS BY 1,000 COMMUNIST GUERRILLAS IN KOITUM PROVINCE. AN ARMY COMMAND COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT DURING THE MONTH OF AUGUST THERE WERE 41 ENGAGEMENTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT FORCES AND COMMUNIST REBELS IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

091761 A BRITISH ADVISORY MISSION ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICY MATTERS, HEADED BY R. THOMPSON (FORMER PERMANENT DEFENSE SECRETARY IN MALAYA) LEFT SOUTH VIETNAM.

091861 COMMUNIST FORCES ESTIMATED AT 1,500 MEN ATTACKED AND SEIZED THE CAPITAL OF PHUOC THUEN PROVINCE ONLY 60 MILES FROM SAIGON.

092561 PRESIDENT KENNEDY, ADDRESSING THE U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN N.Y., DECLARED THAT A THREAT TO PEACE WAS THE SMOLDERING COALS OF WAR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

100161 SEATO MILITARY EXPERTS MET IN BANGKOK, THAILAND, TO CONSIDER THE INCREASING COMMUNIST MENACE TO SOUTH VIETNAM. ADM. HARRY D. FELT, U.S. NAVY COMMANDER IN CHIEF IN THE PACIFIC, DECLARED THAT THERE WAS NO IMMEDIATE PROSPECT OF USING U.S. TROOPS TO STOP THE COMMUNIST ADVANCES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, BUT HE INDICATED THAT AMONG THE PLANS EVOLVED FOR EVENTUALITY, SOME DID CALL FOR THE USE OF AMERICAN TROOPS.

100261 PRES. DIEM = "IT IS NO LONGER A GUERRILLA WAR WAGED BY AN ENEMY WHO ATTACKS US WITH REGULAR UNITS FULLY AND HEAVILY EQUIPPED AND WHO SEEKS A STRATEGIC DECISION IN S.E.ASIA IN CONFORMITY WITH THE ORDERS OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL."  
THE PRESIDENT ALSO SAID THAT THE U.S. COMMITTEE HEADED BY DR. EUGENE STALEY RECOMMENDED AN INCREASE IN AID BOTH FOR MILITARY MEASURES AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

101161 PRES. KENNEDY ANNOUNCED (AT HIS NEWS CONFERENCE) THAT HE WAS SENDING GEN. MAXWELL D. TAYLOR, HIS MILITARY ADVISER, TO SOUTH VIETNAM TO INVESTIGATE THERE THE MILITARY SITUATION AND TO REPORT ON IT TO HIM PERSONALLY.

101861 A STATE OF EMERGENCY WAS PROCLAIMED IN SOUTH VIETNAM BY PRESIDENT DIEM.

111661 FOLLOWING CLOSELY THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN GENERAL TAYLOR'S REPORT, PRESIDENT KENNEDY (WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL) DECIDED TO BOLSTER SOUTH VIETNAM'S MILITARY STRENGTH, BUT NOT TO COMMIT U.S. COMBAT FORCES AT THIS TIME.

12 61 THERE WERE 170,000 VIETNAMESE ARMY TROOPS.

12 61 THE NUMBER OF CIVIL GUARD TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM HAD RISEN TO 60,000.



120861 U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT PUBLISHED A WHITE PAPER THAT STATED THAT SOUTH VIETNAM WAS THREATENED BY CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER OF COMMUNIST CONQUEST.

121461 U.S. PRES. KENNEDY PLEDGED INCREASED AID TO SOUTH VIETNAM.

122961 U.S. AMBASSADOR TO VIETNAM WITHDREW EARLIER OPPOSITION TO INCREASE IN VIETNAMESE FORCE LEVELS.

063062 MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ADVISORY GROUP LEFT VIETNAM.

U.S. TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY,  
1954-1959

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#### IV. A. 4.

### U.S. TRAINING OF THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARMY, 1954-1959

#### A. Why did the U.S. undertake the training of ARVN?

Underlying the U.S. decision to train the ARVN were broad political objectives and beliefs relating to Asia, together with narrower considerations relating to methods of achieving U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia. Both broad and narrow considerations had their origins in the post-World War II chaos in Asia; both stemmed from the overall U.S. aim to deter or defeat communist aggression wherever and whenever it might occur; and both became pillars of U.S. Indochina policy with the fall of Mainland China to the communists in 1949.

On the broader level, the U.S. decision to train the Vietnamese armed forces was viewed as necessary to preserve the independence and freedom of Vietnam south of the 17th parallel, an essential prerequisite to the containment of communism. Containment--lately a function of SEATO as well as of the U.S.--was viewed as essential to the preservation of the rest of Southeast Asia from communist domination and control. Communist domination of the area was viewed as the outcome associated with the fall of Free Vietnam by the proponents of the domino theory, which continued as a major influence on U.S. foreign policy throughout the period examined here. "In view of the importance of Vietnam to all of Southeast Asia, I am convinced that the United States should expend the funds, materiel, and effort required to strengthen the country and help it retain its independence," reported General J. Lawton Collins. "If the chances of success are difficult to calculate, the results of a withdrawal of American aid are all too certain, not only in Vietnam, but throughout Southeast Asia. Such a withdrawal would hasten the rate of communist advances in the Far East as a whole and could result in the loss of Southeast Asia to communism. In my opinion, the chance of success is not only worth the gamble; we cannot afford to let free Vietnam go by default." 3/

On the narrower level, several considerations tended to urge an affirmative decision concerning a training role for the U.S.:

1. Throughout the French-Indochina war, U.S. authorities continually urged the French to create and train a Vietnamese National Army. This measure was pressed not only because the U.S. believed it to be a necessary political gesture (evidence of the true independence of the Associated States), but also because U.S. experts viewed it as a military measure vital to the successful prosecution of the war. 4/



2. The U.S. was never satisfied with French efforts concerning the Vietnamese National Army and was continually frustrated by apparent French reluctance to act on this score. Particularly disturbing to U.S. officials were French inaction concerning formation of the VNA into divisional units, French training procedures, and French reluctance to develop a Vietnamese officer corps: in short, acute frustration was caused by French refusal to initiate changes U.S. officials believed, rightly or wrongly, that the U.S. could and would initiate if the U.S. were in charge.

3. The U.S. had the capability to train "native armies," as demonstrated by Korean forces. Although U.S. pressure on the French culminated in a French visit to Korea to observe U.S. training methods and procedures, the French were most impressed with the unsuitability of Korean forces and the methods used to train them to the situation in Indochina. 5/

4. The U.S. had been considering the idea of U.S. training of Vietnamese forces since early in the Indochina war; in fact, the U.S. had been asked as early as 1950 to participate in a Vietnamese plan for a Vietnamese National Army trained and equipped by the U.S. without French participation. 6/ The U.S. attitude was ambivalent. As early as April 1952 the Service Secretaries suggested that the U.S. expand the Indochina MAAG to undertake training and equipping of a national army should the French declare their intention to withdraw from Indochina; 7/ in January 1954 General Erskine suggested elevating MAAG to the status of a mission "to help in training." 8/ On the other hand, although the theme of U.S. training of Vietnamese forces became increasingly prominent from early 1953 on, a high-level committee in Defense recommended against seeking direct American participation in training in January of that year, and the JCS agreed with this recommendation, which stemmed from French opposition to any such role for the U.S., relatively higher French qualifications to train the local armies, and from the language problem. 9/ As the war neared its close, however, CHMAAG General O'Daniel, in face of firm and consistent opposition from the French, pressed harder and harder for a direct American involvement in the training of Vietnamese forces; in May 1954 General Ely, the French High Commander, apparently succumbed to O'Daniel's pressure to agree to U.S. training of, and the positioning of U.S. advisors with, Vietnamese units. 10/ On 9 June 1954, Ely, through O'Daniel, requested the U.S. to organize and supervise the training of Vietnamese divisions, and to do the same for all other Vietnamese training. 11/ By this time, however, U.S. decisionmakers believed that the "situation in Vietnam has degenerated to point where any commitments at this time to send over U.S. instructors in near future might expose us to being faced with situation in which it would be contrary to our interests to have to fulfill such commitments," 12/ and they feared that, "It may be that in effort to draw U.S. into conflict without having U.S. conditions on intervention met, French military may now seek U.S. training



in advance of U.S. commitment to intervene with own combat forces.... We are resolved not to get drawn in to training program to reverse situation training program has virtually no chance of success...." 13/ Although O'Daniel repeatedly requested a reversal of this decision, going as far as to request his plea be passed on "to the highest authority" on 26 June, 14/ the denial stood to the end of the Indochina war.

5. This prolonged involvement with the problem of affording U.S. assistance in training of the Vietnamese National Army lost hardly any of the momentum given it by General O'Daniel during the final days of the Indochina war in spite of the U.S. decision to stop all aid shipments to Indochina on 30 July 1954 and to reconsider the entire problem of U.S. actions relating to Indochina. 15/ On 27 July, General O'Daniel again urged that the U.S., without French interference, undertake a priority program for training the Vietnamese Army, and took steps to expand the authorized roster of MAAG personnel prior to the Geneva-imposed strength ceiling deadline of 11 August without Washington approval of the program. 16/ It is believed that this momentum, generated in Saigon and supported by the Department of State, was of itself of considerable importance in the actual taking of the decision to organize and train Vietnamese forces.

B. How was the decision to organize and train Vietnamese forces taken?

Ambassador Heath and his superiors in the Department of State "strongly concurred" with General O'Daniel's recommendation of 27 July that the U.S. undertake a priority program to train the Vietnamese Army. 17/ The JCS, however, recommended that "before the United States assumes responsibility for training the forces of any of the Associated States certain preconditions were four in number: "a reasonably strong, stable civil government in control"; a request from each of the Associated States that the U.S. "assume responsibility for training their forces and providing the military equipment, financial assistance, and political advice necessary to insure internal stability"; arrangements with the French "granting full independence to the Associated States and providing for the phased orderly withdrawal of French forces, French officials, and French advisors from Indochina"; and "the size and composition of the forces...should be dictated by the local military requirements and the over-all U.S. interests." 18/ These recommendations were transmitted by the Secretary of Defense to the Secretary of State by letter. 19/

In response to this letter, Secretary Dulles indicated that Cambodia had already met the recommended conditions, and that although Vietnam had not yet done so, the U.S. should nonetheless undertake a training program since strengthening the army was in fact prerequisite to stability ("one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong is to assist it in reorganizing the National Army and in training that Army.") 20/ Although in approving



NSC 5429/2, which provided for the maintenance of forces in Indochina as necessary to assure the internal security of the area, the NSC had apparently decided the issue in favor of the Secretary of State, the disagreement between State and Defense continued with an additional dispute concerning the level of forces to be maintained. In agreeing to train Cambodian forces, the JCS in effect reasserted their earlier position vis-à-vis Vietnam:

However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff note with concern the unstable political situation presently existing within the state of South Vietnam, and accordingly consider that this is not a propitious time to further indicate United States intentions with respect to the support and training of either the Vietnamese regular or police forces. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend against the assignment of a training mission to MAAG Saigon. 21/

In recommending force levels for Vietnam, the JCS reiterated the above recommendation and pointed out that the US MAAG would be limited by the Geneva cease-fire agreement, that "the development of the proposed forces...will require extensive and detailed training which will extend over a period of 3 to 5 years," and that "in view of the uncertain capabilities of the French and Vietnamese to retrieve, retain, and reorganize the dispersed forces of Vietnam, it may be several years before an effective military force will exist. Therefore, U.S. military support to that area, including the training and equipping of forces, should be accomplished at low priority and not at the expense of other U.S. military programs and should not be permitted to impair the development through MDA programs of effective and reliable forces elsewhere." 22/

The JCS proposed Vietnamese forces of 184,000 (5 divisions of light infantry including one light artillery battalion per division--41,000; 12 regiments--24,000; gendarmerie--9,000; Headquarters, Service and Support forces--110,000), a militia of 50,000, and a small air force and navy, and proposed that "French forces consisting of a minimum of 4 divisions...should be retained in this country until phased out by U.S.-trained Viet Nam units." 23/

The Secretary of State, still believing in the need for a U.S. training mission, disagreed with the force levels proposed by the JCS, considering them excessive to the requirement of maintaining internal security as expressed in NSC 5429/2. 24/ On 19 October the JCS argued that their force proposals were justified by the ultimate objectives of the forces of Vietnam and repeated their opposition, from a military point of view, to U.S. participation in the training of Vietnamese forces. Their memorandum concluded, however, by providing the concession the Department of State must have so eagerly sought:

However, if it is considered that political considerations are overriding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would agree to the assignment of a training mission to MAAG, Saigon, with safeguards against French interference with the U.S. training mission. 25/

With this crack in the Defense position, the OCB recommended, and the NSC approved a limited and interim training program for Vietnam. On 22 October a Joint State-Defense message was dispatched to Saigon authorizing Ambassador Heath and General O'Daniel to "collaborate in setting in motion a crash program designed to bring about an improvement in the loyalty and the effectiveness of the Free Vietnamese forces," 26/ and on 26 October the Secretary of Defense, in accordance with the request of the President, instructed the JCS to prepare a "long-range program for the reorganization and training of the minimum number of Free Vietnamese forces necessary for internal security (paragraph 10d/1 of NSC 5429/2)." 27/ The decision, subject only to refinement, negotiation with the French, and reexamination in the light of redevelopments, had been taken--and had been taken largely on the basis of an opening in the position of the Department of Defense which, far from dealing with the specific and reasonable objections to U.S. training of Vietnamese forces, simply avoided those objections by making the concession on totally different grounds. 28/

The impact of the President's decision not to assist the French by bombing at Dien Bien Phu and of his refusal to permit the landing of a U.S. force in the Hanoi-Haiphong area after the fall of Dien Bien Phu as recommended by the Chairman of the JCS also seems to have contributed to this concession. As reported by James Gavin, "...there was a compromise. We would not attack North Vietnam, but we would support a South Vietnamese government that we would provide a stable, independent government that was representative of the people. As I said before, we saw ourselves as the good guys. The French had let us down, but we would continue the battle. Also, we in the Army were so relieved that we had blocked the decision to commit ground troops to Vietnam that we were in no mood to quibble over the compromise." 29/

The refinement of the decision to organize and train the national army, dealing with missions and force levels, was completed by the JCS on 17 November 1954; in an interesting change of position (see note 28), the Joint Chiefs asserted that "MAAG Indochina is capable of furnishing training assistance to develop the internal security Army and Navy forces, provided: a. A maximum portion of the MAAG military personnel is devoted to training; and b. The cooperation and collaboration of the French MAAG is secured." 30/

Negotiations with the French were completed when the agreed minute of understanding between General J. Lawton Collins and General



Paul Ely of 13 December 1954 was approved by the U.S. and, later, by the French governments. The agreement, which provided for full autonomy for Vietnamese forces by 1 July 1955 and for assumption by the US MAAG of full responsibility for assisting the Government of Vietnam in the organizing and training of armed forces (under the general supervision of the French High Commander and with the help of French advisors), led to the assumption of this responsibility by General O'Daniel on 12 February 1955.

The reexamination of the decision, reported by the JCS on 21 January 1955, suggested that "although national policy prescribes making every possible effort to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the communists, the degree to which the United States is willing to support this policy in men, money, materials, and acceptance of additional war risks is not readily apparent," and urged that: "Prior to consideration of military courses of action with respect to this area, a firm decision at national level as to implementation of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia is mandatory." Although no such decision was forthcoming, and even this reexamination of the decision to assist the Vietnamese did not choose one course of action over any other, it did imply by repeated honks on the domino klaxon that U.S. assistance to Vietnam was required. When, a week later, General Collins expressed in more positive terms this need, the way was clear for the NSC to endorse a strong U.S. policy in Vietnam, 31/ confirming General O'Daniel's takeover on February 12--but the extent to which the U.S. was prepared to support this policy (then or now) was never made clear.

### C. What was the threat to South Vietnam?

In addition to the more general considerations underlying the U.S. decision to train Vietnamese forces was the specific consideration of the enemy threat to South Vietnam. As perceived during the time this decision was being taken, the threat consisted of three elements: the dissident sect forces in South Vietnam; the communist forces in South Vietnam, dominated by the decisionmakers in Hanoi; and the Vietnamese People's Army of North Vietnam.

1. The sect forces, consisting of an estimated 10,000 Cao Dai, 2,500 Hoa Hao, and 2,600 Binh Xuyen forces, plus the urban police forces which were at that time under the control of the Binh Xuyen, were in opposition to the fledgling Diem government. 32/ "The politico-religious armed groups called the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen are anti-communist in orientation, but feudalistic and regressive in all other respects. At present they have an effective veto power over government action. This power they use to block reforms which might threaten their preferred military, economic, and political status. They will

retain their power to threaten and harass the government until the National Army is strong enough to neutralize their forces." 33/

The sects thus were regarded as an internal security threat--and more specifically as a threat to the Diem government. By some in Saigon they were regarded as the major internal threat. 34/ Long subsidized by the French as their partners in the Indochina war, and faced with the end of French financial assistance, major elements of the sect forces were integrated into the Vietnamese National Army; other elements, including the Hoa Hao forces of Da Cut, were fragmented and reduced to low-level dissidence by government forces, according to contemporary intelligence estimates, by 1956. 35/ There is some evidence that these fragmented groups were penetrated by the communists, however, and that they were used by the communists throughout the period. In this role the sects represented a continuing, if low-level, insurgent threat as an element in the overall internal security problem not qualitatively different from that represented by the communists themselves.

2. The Viet Minh Residue in South Vietnam was generally regarded as the instrument with which "the Communists" would pursue their "objective of securing control of all Indochina." 36/ Contemporary (1954) intelligence reports indicated the belief that

...the Viet Minh will seek to retain sizeable military and political assets in South Vietnam. Although the Geneva agreements provide for the removal to the north of all Viet Minh forces, many of the regular and irregular Viet Minh soldiers now in the south are natives of the area, and large numbers of them will probably cache their arms and remain in South Vietnam. In addition, Viet Minh administrative cadres have been in firm control of several large areas in Central and South Vietnam for several years. These cadres will probably remain in place.... 37/

Later reports confirmed this statement and continued to describe the situation as "precarious." 38/

Estimates during the period of relevance were consistent on the issue of control of the Viet Minh movement in the South: They did not question unity of purpose among the communists of the north and south (or, for that matter, among the members of the communist bloc); they did continue to assert or infer that the Viet Minh in the south were under the control of the Viet Minh in the north. 39/

Viet Minh force levels in the south were variously estimated by the U.S. during this period but never exceeded 10,000; GVN estimates, which tended to include all organized dissidents, were consistently lower than the U.S. estimates, never exceeding 8,000. Of



these estimated dissidents, no more than some 2,000 were considered "active" by any available official estimate in the period 1954-1960. These forces were consistently estimated to be augmented by political and administrative cadre; 40/ their modus operandi was seen as subversion and small-scale guerrilla operation.

Thus the main internal threat to South Vietnam was viewed throughout the period as Hanoi-controlled subversion and small-scale guerrilla operations carried out primarily by military and political cadre of the Viet Minh.

3. The Vietnamese People's Army "continued evolution" into a regular military force during the last year of the French-Indochina war, 41/ and in the period during which the U.S. was deciding to assume responsibility for organizing and training the South Vietnamese army the VPA was judged to be increasing its already formidable capabilities. 42/ In April 1955, the regular VPA, "reorganized and strengthened since Geneva," was estimated to have increased in numbers to 240,000 (largely at the expense of the regional forces of 37,000 and the popular forces of 75,000) and to have been organized into 10 infantry divisions, 2 artillery divisions, 1 AAA groupment, and 25 independent infantry regiments. 43/ Throughout the period 1954-1960 the VPA grew slowly and was consistently estimated to have the capability of defeating both French and Vietnamese forces were VPA forces to undertake an invasion of South Vietnam. It was generally assumed that these forces would be backed by Communist Chinese forces, if such backing proved necessary.

Just as consistent as the high estimates of VPA capabilities were the estimates of the VPA's intentions: the communists, although continuing to pursue their goal of controlling all of Indochina, would "without violating the armistice to the extent of launching an armed invasion to the south or west, pursue their objective by political, psychological, and paramilitary means." 44/ In the fall of 1954 it was reported that "the Viet Minh probably now feels that it can achieve control over all Vietnam without initiating large-scale warfare. Accordingly, we believe that the Communists will exert every effort to accomplish their objectives through means short of war....If, on the other hand, South Vietnam should appear to be gaining in strength or if elections were postponed over Communist objections, the Communists probably would step up their subversive and guerrilla activities in the South and if necessary would infiltrate additional armed forces in an effort to gain control over the area. However, we believe that they would unlikely openly to invade South Vietnam at least prior to July 1954...." 45/

The theme of political, psychological, and paramilitary operations as the communist method of securing its objectives was stressed

in all available estimates throughout the years 1954-1960. No U.S. estimate that it was likely the VPA would overtly invade South Vietnam during that period has been found; on the contrary, in spite of insistence by Diem that invasion by the DRV was a serious possibility, 46/ U.S. estimates continued to stress that such an invasion was unlikely. In the words of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, engaged in the business of determining U.S. policy in the event of aggression in Vietnam, "the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that at this time the major threat to South Vietnam continues to be that of subversion...." 47/

In a somewhat later period it was stated that "The North Vietnamese Army is almost twice the size of the South Vietnamese Army. The threat posed by the large northern forces has put constant psychological pressure on the GVN." 48/ In view of the nature of the U.S. response to the combined threat posed by the sects, the Viet Minh in South Vietnam, and the VPA as reflected in the missions assigned the forces of South Vietnam, it would appear that this "constant psychological pressure" had telling effects on U.S. as well as GVN policymakers.



D. What was the mission of Vietnamese forces?

The mission initially envisioned for the forces of Free Vietnam by the principal advocate of a U.S. role in organizing and training those forces, the Secretary of State, was simply that of providing and maintaining security within the borders of their country, 49/ and it was on this basis that the decision to assume responsibility for the organization and training of the Vietnamese National Army was taken. This single mission concept was in dispute, however, before, during, and after its pronouncement; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in an attempt logically to trace through the web of U.S. commitments woven largely by the Secretary of State, were on the record in opposition to it; 50/ and, in fact, by early 1956 a two- or three-fold mission for South Vietnamese forces was considered more or less established by the Chiefs and by others more directly concerned with the organization and training of the Vietnamese forces. 51/

The evolution of the mission of the Vietnamese forces from that of maintaining internal security to (a) maintaining internal security; (b) resisting external aggression; and (c) contributing to regional defense with other non-Communist countries was affected critically by five factors: the state of U.S. strategic military policy in the mid-1950's; the nature of SEATO and of U.S. views concerning fulfillment of its commitments under that treaty; the withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps; pressures exerted by the Diem government; and recent U.S. experiences in Korea.

1. U.S. strategic military policy in the mid-1950's, as has been well documented, 52/ was both complex and confused, and confusion over the issue of massive retaliation versus local defense was particularly intense. The JCS -- among others -- were unable ever to resolve the dilemma posed by U.S. policy in this regard with respect to the defense of Southeast Asia.

The JCS had contended, first, that "from the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive [presumably narrowly defined] military objectives" 53/ when considering U.S. intervention in the Indochina war, and that the main target of U.S. air and naval forces should be the source of the aggression (i.e., China). But they also contended both during and after the Indochina war that atomic weapons should be used within Vietnam in the local defense of that country -- and that if permission to use such weapons were denied (a spectre which appeared constantly to haunt the Chiefs), U.S. force requirements and the time required to achieve victory would soar. 53/, 54/ Finally, after the French defeat, the Chiefs argued that a ground defense against aggression from North Vietnam by South Vietnamese forces would be necessary to provide time for the U.S. to intervene with ground forces, again using atomic weapons for local defense. 55/

Thus, although U.S. defense policy in the mid-1950's called for main but not sole reliance on nuclear weapons, and on use of massive retaliatory power in response to acts deemed hostile to the interests of the United States, definition of and planning for use of such weapons, in retaliation or otherwise, were so ambiguous, and the concepts themselves so unclear that, particularly when applied to specific remote local defense situations, their value as guidance was virtually nil.

2. The nature of SEATO, and of U.S. views concerning fulfillment of its obligations under the SEATO treaty, necessarily reflected the confusion in overall U.S. defense policy and planning. Added to this general problem was the more specific matter of matching U.S. resources to the worldwide commitments, including SEATO, that had been assumed since the end of World War II. Thus the Joint Chiefs stated that "U.S. commitments to Formosa, Japan and Korea, which nations have been excluded from the SEATO treaty, make it imperative that the United States not be restricted by force commitments in the subject treaty area; 56/ to these commitments must be added the numerous U.S. obligations outside Asia.

As is well-known, the SEATO treaty, pressured into existence by the United States and intended to deter overt aggression by China or other Communist nations, relied heavily in concept on the military participation of the U.S. Faced with the magnitude of U.S. commitments, particularly in relation to the capabilities of the defense establishment, and continually confronted by the considerations and requirements of general war, the JCS sought a way in which U.S. SEATO obligations might be carried out:

5. a. Continued development of combat effective indigenous forces, with their structure and training mutually coordinated to develop local leadership and prestige, and with improved capabilities to create a cohesive fighting force through integration of their operations with adjacent indigenous forces and with support by operations of forces of other Manila Pact members.

b. Readiness to retaliate promptly with attacks by the most effective combination of U.S. armed forces against the military power of the aggressor.

c. Encouragement of other Manila Pact countries to maintain forces in readiness to counter aggression.

d. Discussion, in general terms, of unilateral military plans by the Military Representatives to the Council to the extent necessary to insure maximum participation and cooperation by other member nations but not to the extent that U.S. strategic plans or the availability of U.S. forces for implementing such plans might be revealed.



e. Periodic visits by U.S. forces into the area as demonstrations of intent, and for joint and combined training exercises.

f. Availability of appropriate mechanism for the employment of U.S. forces in support of friendly indigenous forces in support of friendly indigenous forces in the general area.

6. The concept of prompt retaliatory attacks does not envisage attacks on targets within the aggressor country other than on military targets involved in the direct support of the aggressor action. If authorized, atomic weapons would be used, even in a local situation, if such use will bring the aggression to a swift and positive cessation, and if, on a balance of political and military consideration, such use will best advance U.S. security interests. Under the alternative assumption that authority to use atomic weapons cannot be assured, the above concept would not require change, but this assumption would not permit the most effective employment of U.S. armed forces, and consequently might require greater forces than the U.S. would be justified in providing from the over-all point of view. 57/

The clear intent of this concept -- in accordance with SEATO objectives -- is deterrence of and response to overt aggression against South Vietnam, among other countries; in view of limited U.S. resources, and of the recognition of this problem in NSC 162/2, which "envisages reliance on indigenous ground forces to the maximum extent possible," 58/ and in view of the psychological pressure generated by the powerful VPA, the logical consequence of assignment of the mission "to country external aggression" to local South Vietnamese forces is virtually unavoidable. Therefore, the JCS stated their view -- and held to it throughout the period 1954-1960 -- "that the ultimate objectives of the military forces of the Associated States should be:

VIETNAM -- to attain and maintain internal security and to deter Viet Minh aggression by a limited defense of the Geneva Armistice demarcation line. 59/

Although it was not until the publication of NSC 5612/1 in mid-1956 that approved U.S. policy recognized this mission by stating that the U.S. should "assist Free Vietnam to build up indigenous armed forces, including independent logistical and administrative services, which will be capable of assuring internal security and of providing limited initial resistance to attack by the Viet Minh," 60/ unofficial U.S. policy, from the JCS in Washington through the MAAG in Vietnam, 61/ had set in motion programs which implicitly assigned a mission of limited initial resistance to Vietnamese forces which attempted to be both responsive to SEATO requirements and cognizant of U.S. resource limitations.



3. The French Expeditionary Corps, with a force of 176,000 men in October 1954, figured heavily in U.S.-French plans for the defense of South Vietnam. In effect, the FEC was planned to be the shield behind which training of the VNA could be conducted, free of major concern over a Viet Minh attack across the 17th parallel. Unfortunate from the point of view of these plans were the major policy disputes that plagued -- and finally did in -- joint U.S.-French activities in Vietnam.

Dominant among U.S.-French disagreements were the French reluctance to support the Diem Government and the apparent French attitude of conciliation toward the Communists in both North and South Vietnam depends at a minimum on an early and convincing demonstration by the French of their wholehearted support." 62/ It was particularly frustrating not only that no such "wholehearted support" was forthcoming but also that considerable evidence tended to support the belief that the French were actively attempting to overthrow Diem during the period they remained in Vietnam. 63/

French reluctance to support Diem -- or, as the U.S. estimated, "any nationalist government" 64/ -- was consistent with their attitude toward Communist North Vietnam. Although Generals Collins and Ely enjoyed a cordial relationship of mutual trust, there is considerable evidence that Ely was, in a sense, the victim of both his superiors in the French Government and of his subordinates in Vietnam. Thus while Collins almost never expressed doubts regarding Ely's statements to him (and never of his integrity), French politics both high- and low-level, were particularly intense and seemed to be directed toward preservation of French commercial and cultural influence in both North and South Vietnam. The high-level French mission to Hanoi, the Saintenay Mission, was in particular regarded as evidence of French duplicity, although General Ely, in his memoirs, denies such duplicity. 65/ Suspected French assistance to the sect forces opposing the Diem Government and French activities within the joint U.S.-French Training Relations Instruction Mission were also consistent with the policy of preservation of French interests.

For some time U.S. policymakers had been thinking seriously about going it alone in Vietnam without the French. When at the Washington Conference in September 1954, the French delegates discussed their intentions to cut the FEC to 100,000 by the end of 1955 and asked for \$330 million in U.S. support for the FEC at that level, the reaction among U.S. decision makers was negative. On November 5 it was decided that on balance the U.S. would probably fare better in Vietnam without the French, and it was tentatively agreed that the U.S. should not continue its support that had been requested, but should limit the contribution to \$100 million. In their view a complete withdrawal of the FEC in 1955 would create a vacuum that only the Viet Minh could fill, for the VNA would remain incapable of coping even with Viet Minh irregular forces



for at least that period. Furthermore, French cooperation was essential to the success of any U.S. project in Vietnam, and a decision to grant any support for the FEC would jeopardize French cooperation. 66/

Although Heath and Collins prevailed and \$100 million was allocated to support the FEC during 1955, the French were informed that no further assistance could be expected beyond that time. 67/ The French responded by making it clear that a drastic reduction of the FEC was in the offing -- to a level of 40,000 by the end of 1955, and the Foreign Office emphasized that although this action was based entirely on monetary considerations there was also much sentiment in France for transferring the FEC to North Africa. In Vietnam, it was stated, French troops were serving the interests of the Free World; if the Free World would not pay their costs, then they should be sent to North Africa, where they would be serving the interests of France and the French Union. 68/

Pressures applied by Diem also influenced the French exodus. Making no secret of his Franco-phobia, Diem asked the French to withdraw the FEC as early as September 1954, and in March 1955 Premier Faure announced that France would withdraw the FEC at the demand of the Vietnamese Government. By October 1955, the FEC had been reduced to 45,000; 69/ by February 1956 only 15,000 remained; 70/ and on April 1, 1956 the remnants of the FEC left Saigon, leaving only small Air Force and Navy training missions behind.

With the dissolution of the French dissolution of the French high command on April 23, only the VNA was left to carry out the mission of guarding South Vietnam against aggression from the north, a mission which the French had been expected to perform.

4. The pressures exerted by the Diem Government on the U.S. regarding the Vietnamese National Army were consistently in favor of larger forces than the U.S. was willing to support 71/ and in the critically formative years of 1954 and 1955 were oriented toward regular forces organized to combat an invasion from the north as well as to provide internal security. Just as Diem had felt the FEC should be deployed along the 17th parallel, 72/ he believed that the VNA should be manned and organized in such a way as to counter any such invasion, although "from the earliest days senior Vietnamese officers, including General Minh, argued for the creation of an effective grass-roots security organization in the countryside. They knew how the war had been fought and lost. Diem at first had no idea. While the Viet Minh tactics were changing from attrition to annihilation, Diem was abroad. He returned with the opinion that aircraft and naval craft were the essentials and that even infantry were no necessary. Later he developed an attachment to artillery.... By the time he came round to accepting the advice of his own generals, the United States had embarked on its major plans for major reorganization, and the paramilitary forces, which Diem had created in a half-hearted way, were withering on the vine." 73/



5. Recent U.S. experiences in Korea were of two kinds: a tremendous effort to counter an invasion by a large Communist conventional army across a parallel of latitude with a large conventional army composed primarily of U.S. and U.S.-trained "native" troops; and an anti-guerrilla effort so miniscule as to be accorded to U.S. forces and less than half a short paragraph in General Matthew B. Ridgway's 291-page book on the Korean war.

...So it seemed a good time [in November 1951] to take care of a persistent annoyance -- the existence of large bands of guerrillas in South Korea, particularly in the mountainous areas northwest of Chinju, where they had taken refuge after the Communist retreat. Van Fleet assigned Lieutenant General Paik Sun Yup, with two ROK divisions, to Operation RATHKILLER, designed to rid us of this potentially dangerous threat. By the end of January 1952, nearly 20,000 freebooters -- bandits and organized guerrillas -- had been killed or captured and the irritation was ended for good. 74

In view of the Korean experience, not yet two years old at the time of O'Daniel's assumption of responsibility and training of the Vietnamese National Army, it is hardly surprising that the mission of defense, however limited, of the 17th parallel was envisioned for these Vietnamese forces to complement the more limited mission of achieving and maintaining internal security. Nor perhaps is it surprising that this mission came to dominate the organization and training of the VNA.

E. What was the state of the South Vietnamese Army?

While the U.S. was still in the process of taking the decision to assume responsibility for organizing and training the Vietnamese army, NIE-63-7-54 reported on the condition of that army. Related documents give no reason to suspect the accuracy of this estimate or to believe the estimate overstates the magnitude of the tasks the U.S. was about to undertake:

23. The Vietnamese National Army has an estimated strength of 170,000 regulars and 10,000 auxiliaries. Naval and air strength is negligible. The regulars include 5 infantry regiments and 152 combat battalions, of which 69 are infantry, 61 light infantry, 8 guard, 5 airborne infantry, 8 artillery, and one armored reconnaissance. The regroupment necessitated by the Geneva Agreements has forced many units to leave their home provinces for the first time, resulting in a considerable number of desertions since 1 June (up to 25 percent of the total army strength). Some auxiliaries and other seminilitary forces are being demobilized, with the exception of the armed forces of the South Vietnamese sects and certain guard and militia elements.



The Vietnamese General Staff has become so involved in political affairs that it has neglected the required planning of an adequate internal security program. This neglect has fostered a spirit of insubordination and irresponsibility throughout the army. The army in some instances has been incapable of executing occupation and pacification operations in areas formerly under Viet Minh control. Almost all units, particularly those from North Vietnam, require a period of intensive training and reorganization to bring them up to strength and improve their effectiveness.

24. Advisory and training aid is provided by approximately 4,800 French officers and NCO's currently serving in the French Military Mission to Vietnam. This mission is to be increased to 6,000 by the end of 1954. These individuals serve in command, staff, and advisory roles on the Vietnamese General Staff in the territorial command structure, and in training establishments. About 20 percent of Vietnamese infantry units and 50 percent of support and technical units are cadred at least partially by the French. The army is still under French operational control and continues to be completely dependent on the French for logistic support.

25. A major reason for the ineffectiveness of the Vietnamese National Army is its lack of adequately trained officers. Only about one percent have received training roughly equivalent to that of a US army officer of field grade and virtually none has a comparable background of staff and command experience. Very few of the Vietnamese officers would be competent even in assignments justified by their training and experience, and even fewer are capable of an adequate performance at the higher positions of responsibility which they now hold. Their background is one of subordination to French command, and they are inclined to rely heavily on French advisers even when given positions of authority and responsibility.

26. The other serious deficiencies in the South Vietnamese national forces, ineffective organization and training and absence of logistics and technical services, are related to the lack of leadership and stem from the same basic cause, i.e., French failure to train and develop qualified leaders. This situation can be resolved only over a period of time and only if an intensive program for the progressive development of an effective officer corps is soon initiated.

28. We have little information on the strength and status of other semi-military and police forces....

29. South Vietnam's mobilizable manpower pool is estimated at 1,500,000 physically fit, military-age males, of which about 20 percent are now under arms. An additional 10 percent could

probably be mobilized without initially curtailing essential economic activities. The Vietnamese Government would be almost entirely dependent upon foreign aid to support such a force.

30. The Diem Government proposes to expand the army to 200,000 by the end of 1954, and to 225,000 by the end of 1955. By the latter date, the army would include 10 divisions plus 60 territorial battalions. The cost of maintaining these forces through 1955 has been estimated at about \$450,000,000 of which almost all would have to be furnished by external assistance. The French have supported this proposal as being required.... A proposal for development of a National Guard under the Ministry of the Interior has been postponed pending the outcome of French-Vietnamese-United States discussions.

31. On the other hand, the United States is considering the reduction of the Vietnamese army to about 80,000, including 3 combat light divisions. These reduced forces would have primarily an internal security mission. Against a large-scale Viet Minh invasion, they would serve only as a delaying force. Cost of maintaining the forces at the reduced levels has been tentatively estimated at about \$200,000,000 per year. This estimated cost is in addition to financial, economic, and military support funds, which might total \$150,000,000 per year. 75/

Thus a listing of problems and deficiencies to be dealt with would contain at least the following: force size; force structure; disengagement of general staff from political affairs; planning of an internal security program; planning of a delaying strategy to counter invasion from the north; correction of a spirit of insubordination and irresponsibility; replacing French cadre; developing a self-reliant officer corps; developing an independent logistics capability; developing adequate technical services; development of training system and program; learning about and coping with the problems of semi-military and police forces; resolving the problem of the National Guard.

#### F. How did the U.S. go about altering the state of the VNA?

With the JCS-recommended force levels for Indochina forwarded to Secretary of Defense on 22 November 1954, the upper bound of the regular Vietnamese army force goals was established at 184,000; 76/ the taking into account of the objections of Secretary of State, who regarded this force level as "excessive" to the mission of establishing and maintaining internal security, 77/ set the lower-bound goal of approximately 88,000. The earliest U.S. actions toward the VNA were devoted to reducing the VNA to this lower level while reorganizing the forces in order to rectify as many as possible of the problems listed above.



Although at this stage MAAG was charged solely with the task of assisting the Vietnamese to develop a force capable of establishing and maintaining internal security, the second mission of limited resistance to an onslaught from the north was reflected in General Collins' recommendations of 15 November. In recommending a force level of some 88,000, General Collins indicated his belief that divisional combat elements should be included in the force structure to assist the FEC to absorb the shock of invasion if hostilities were renewed as well as, if called upon, to reinforce the security troops in pacification activities. General Collins also contended that to reduce the VNA by half without at the same time providing forces organized for combat rather than merely for security duty was certain to have a bad effect on Vietnamese morale. 73/

Accordingly, General Collins recommended that the U.S. support a small, well-balanced force including 13 security regiments and an airborne RCT for internal security purposes and a three-field-division force to delay any Communist invasion until external assistance from the Manila powers could arrive. A small navy and air force were recommended to complete the Vietnamese defense establishment. 79/

On 17 November the JCS approved Collins' recommendations, emphasizing, however, that this program "does not provide adequate security for the Associated States against external aggression after the withdrawal of the French forces. With the Viet Minh increasing the size and effectiveness of their forces and with no force in being committed to mutual defense under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the above long-range program would be insufficient to provide more than limited initial resistance to an organized military assault by the Viet Minh." 80/ In his report of 20 January, Collins expanded on this recommended force structure, a structure "based on the concept that a relatively small force, properly trained, equipped and led can perform the above missions more effectively and at less cost than a larger force which would be disproportionate to the economic and manpower capacities of the country." 81/

The task of assuring that Vietnamese forces were properly trained, equipped, and led fell initially to the Training Relations Instruction Mission (TRIM), a joint U.S.-French enterprise under USMAAG Chief O'Daniel. Although the Collins-Ely minute of understanding did not go into effect until 12 February 1955, O'Daniel had begun to implement that agreement in 1954 by organizing TRIM, which consisted of all French and U.S. advisory and training personnel as well as French cadres with Vietnamese units, for this purpose. 32/ During 1955, TRIM occupied itself with organizing a military school system, setting up programs for training officers and specialists in the U.S. and other countries, and reducing the language barrier. Much time and thought went into planning for reorganizing and training the army on a divisional rather than a battalion basis, but TRIM accomplished little in this area during



1955 because of the continued employment of the VNA against the sects and because of the French phaseout, which was well underway during that year. 83/

The continuing conflict with sect forces, the reduction and eventual withdrawal of the FEC, the lack of a capability to demobilize efficiently, concern about overloading the economy with unemployed veterans (potential grist for the sects' and for the Communists' mill), and the fact that the 88,000-man VNA was viewed as only slightly larger than the sect forces alone led the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense (MOD) to object to the 88,000 force level in 1954. As a first compromise, CINMAAG indicated that the U.S. would agree to supporting a goal of 100,000 by the end of 1955; the same factors led to O'Daniel's recommendation of a goal of U.S.-supported forces of 150,000 (plus 10,000 sect-troops) by 1 July 1954. 84/ Ambassador Reinhardt and CINCPAC fully endorsed O'Daniel's recommendation, and the JCS recommended approval of this force basis. 85/ Upon DOD approval, MAAG immediately began planning for the reorganization of Vietnamese forces "according to American concepts" 86/ and at the newly approved level. The organizing and training of this force of 4 field divisions, 6 light divisions, 13 territorial regiments, 1 airborne RCT, and supporting troops, plus an air force and navy of limited size, was to occupy MAAG until the reorganization of 1959. 87/

To accomplish this task, MAAG had a total strength of 342 officers and men, of which 220 were assigned TRFM in February 1955. With the French withdrawing personnel engaged in processing MDAP equipment, MAAG found it difficult to supervise redistribution and end use of this material. 88/ As early as February, before the French began to withdraw, O'Daniel had reported he needed twice the authorized MAAG strength to accomplish this mission; 89/ both O'Daniel and CINCPAC argued against the State Department's interpretation that Article 16 of the Geneva Agreement held MAAG to a ceiling of 342 personnel and the JCS recommended "that the Secretary of Defense inform the National Security Council of the gravity of the situation in Vietnam, requesting the authority to raise the 342 limitation;" 90/ and the Secretary of Defense, in forwarding these dissenting views to the Secretary of State, agreed with the dissenter. 91/ Before the Secretary of State could reply to the DOD inquiry, an interagency costing team which had just returned from Vietnam reported that because of the reduction in French personnel control of MDAP supplies and spaces had been lost and that as a result, "the capability of supply of forces in the field in the event hostilities should be resumed in mid-1956 would be virtually non-existent." 92/

On February 3, 1956, the Department of State acquiesced in the creation of the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM). 93/ By the end of 1956, this group of 350 military personnel had greatly facilitated the recovery and redistribution of MDAP equipment; although they



were not part of MAAG, they had also improved the organization of Vietnamese logistical services and had launched an extensive logistical training program. In addition, TERM relieved MAAG of logistical responsibilities, thus freeing MAAG personnel for training. 94/ Thereafter, the MAAG training program "gained momentum." 95/

This momentum was in the direction of training and organizing the VNA so that it would have its proper role in the overall defense of Vietnam as had already been envisioned by the MAAG in 1955:

(1) The organization and missions of the National Army, Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps all supplementary in assuring adequate internal security for Free Vietnam. The National Army retains overall responsibility for internal security in accordance with its assigned mission. The development of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps as supplementary internal security agencies will, at nominal cost, provide for increased internal security and simultaneously afford necessary relief of army units for necessary combat training, thus greatly increasing the potential of Free Vietnam to resist armed aggression from without, coordinated with guerrilla and subversive action from within.

(2) The Civil Guard will be responsible for (a) nationwide civil law enforcement except in those cities having municipal police, (b) supplementing the Army Territorial Regiments in maintain internal security, and (c) serving as an operating agency for the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation in the collection of anti-subversive intelligence. The Civil Guard will possess the necessary mobility to concentrate against strong subversive actions, supplementing and lending breadth to the Army Territorial Battalions....

(3) Neither the Army nor the Civil Guard will have the necessary strength, dispersion or familiarity to provide necessary protection for widely scattered and numerous (approximately 6,000) villages against subversive actions of Viet Minh cadres and dissident sect personnel. The Self-Defense Corps, operating with 10-men armed units in each village, would possess these requirements to the degree necessary to ferret out and eliminate existent or potential subversive movements.... The Army and the Self-Defense Corps will have the same command channels.... Close coordination will exist between Self-Defense Corps units and the Civil Guard on the lower levels. 96/

No concept for defending Free Vietnam could be clearer: the regular army in command of (or in close coordination with) the irregulars who will have the capability to free the army to fill an army role -- "to resist armed aggression from without." Unfortunately, however sound this



concept may have been -- and in view of demonstrated Viet Cong and DRV flexibility it is not clear that the concept was completely unsound -- it was never successfully implemented. The VNA, gradually transformed into ARVN, was organized and trained along U.S. lines (at least in the view of those doing the training and reporting on their progress 97/ and by the end of 1958 MAAG was able to state that "The combat posture of the Vietnamese Armed Forces has improved to a marked degree in the past few years. At the end of CY 1958, the Vietnamese Army, compared with other army forces in Southeast Asia, reached a relatively high degree of combat effectiveness...." 98/ But the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps were never brought to the stage of development at which they might have relieved the army of the internal security mission for which its new-found organization, training, and equipment were rendering it unfit.

As far as can be estimated on the basis of available information, training within Vietnam was conducted in as centralized a fashion as possible. Limited availability of personnel and GVN opposition precluded posting of U.S. advisors to lower than airborne brigade level until 1961, although the need for advisors at lower levels was well recognized. 99/ Training methods were, as far as can be judged, standard U.S. methods minimally adapted to the Vietnamese context; standard training cycles similar to U.S. programs were employed; extensive use was made of translated U.S. training films and training and field manuals. Extensive training of Vietnamese officers in the U.S. was conducted. Combat and support units, especially logistics units, benefited equally from U.S. methods and procedures. Equipment (including personal gear) reflected U.S. taste in kind, if not in quality. And U.S. organizational preferences became fully realized when, in 1959, the agitation begun by General O'Daniel during the Indochina war had its full flowering in the reorganization of the Vietnamese Army into a General Headquarters, Field Command, six Military Region Headquarters, two Corps Headquarters and Corps Troops, one provisional Corps Headquarters, and seven standard divisions of 10,500 men each. By 1959 these forces were judged capable of maintaining internal security and of providing limited initial resistance to any renewed aggression from the North. 100/

In spite of all this progress, however, MAAG statements in 1959 reveal that many of the problems and deficiencies found in the VNA of 1954 and noted above were still to be found in the ARVN of 1959: 101/ although force size had been settled by fiat, it was still a troublesome problem particularly vis-a-vis the GVN which persisted in its desire for larger forces; force structure was still unclear, particularly with reference to command and control; as the abortive coup of 1960 was to show, high-ranking officers were still politically active; 102/ plans for an internal security program relied heavily on the virtually non-existent capabilities of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps;



correction of a spirit of insubordination and irresponsibility was not complete, as revealed at low as well as high (or "coup") levels; 103/ French cadre had been replaced, but with Vietnamese cadre generally less well-adapted to their role; a self-reliant officer corps was still a vision of the future, as were an independent logistics capability and adequate technical services; and although something had been learned about the problems of semi-military and police forces, not enough had been done to cope with them to provide genuine internal security.

There were, in fact, several views of the roles and missions of the paramilitary forces. The Michigan State University Advisory Group, under contract to USCIB, Vietnam to provide counsel and guidance on the development of the Civil Guard (CG), viewed this organization as a national police, civilian in character and function, lightly but adequately equipped, with sufficient delegated authority and training to enforce all laws, control subversion, and collect intelligence data in areas not covered by municipal police, as well as establishing close ties with the population of the rural areas by fixed basing in the villages within pacified areas. 104/ Diem envisaged the CG as a large and powerful military organization accountable to him through his appointed province chiefs -- a counter to the army in the struggle for power which would also provide provincial security through mobility from posts outside the villages; in line with this view, he transferred the CG from the Ministry of the Interior to the Presidency in 1956. The USMAAG came to view the CG much as Diem did -- not, of course, as an anti-coup safeguard, but as a mobile countersubversion force, an adjunct to the army that would relieve it of internal security duty and free it to learn how to counter the threat from the North. 105/ As of the end of 1956 the CG were being trained at the Quang Trung School to assist the army in case of crisis or of overt attack; 106/ by late 1957, they were conducting operations with ARVN in unpacified areas. 107/

The MSU Advisory Group, in a 1956 report, 108/ outlined the problems that existed with respect to the problems of the several Vietnamese law enforcement agencies, including the CG, and made far-reaching recommendations, some of which were reiterated in the Counterinsurgency Plan of 1960. 109/ This reiteration supports the hypothesis that few of the MSU recommendations were acted upon effectively in the intervening years.

In July 1957, the GVN requested \$60 million worth of heavy equipment for the CG, which had been equipped only with non-U.S. weapons surplus to the army's requirements. MAAG and MSU proposed \$14 - 18 million in lighter equipment; in 1958, a compromise was reached, providing for only \$14 million but including some of the heavy equipment to be issued over a 4-year period with the understanding that the CG be reorganized into a civilian operation under the Ministry of Interior and along lines proposed by U.S. advisors. 110/ Little progress was made in changing the Civil Guard, however, in spite of this U.S. leverage; the \$14 million in

assistance was withheld for almost two years. In January 1959, Diem agreed to transfer the CG to the Minister of the Interior, and the U.S. agreed to go ahead with the aid program. The new Public Safety Division of USOM assumed responsibility for training the CG in June, but the impasse over the concept of the CG continued until December 1960, when Diem, at MAAG's urging, transferred the CG to the DOD. 111/

The Self-Defense Corps (SDC), like the CG, was armed with non-U.S. weapons surplus to the army's requirements. Established by Diem as a part of the DOD, the SDC received U.S. assistance from its inception in the form of a \$6 million per year subsidy for salaries. All reports indicate that the SDC was in even worse shape than the CG. The controversy that engulfed both these organizations for five years produced two paramilitary units that, far from being adequate to free the army for "combat," were confusingly organized, inadequately equipped, poorly trained, and badly led -- even when compared with ARVN. 112/

According to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College "Study on Army Aspects of the Military Assistance Program in Vietnam," published in June 1960, 113/. "The Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam are anxious to take the offensive and 'march to Hanoi.' The Chief, MAAG, and his principal assistants who come in direct contact with the Vietnamese high command must be constantly alert to detect this desire and any evidence of preparations therefor, as the consequences of such a premature act, not only to the numerically inferior South Vietnamese Armed Forces, but also to the entire region and possibly the whole world, could be most serious." Given the deficiencies remaining in the seven standard division regular army that would do the marching, and the state of the paramilitary forces, the authors of this study were well advised to add, parenthetically and perhaps wistfully: "(Eventual reunification through 'peaceful means' is to be hoped for.)"



G. Did U.S. assistance through 1960 result in creation of a South Vietnamese Army in the image of the U.S. Army?

While it would probably be incorrect to assert that the U.S. created a complete "mirror image" of its own forces in the Vietnamese defense establishment, consideration of the mission, strategy, tactics, organizations, manpower policy, equipment, and training of that establishment indicates that conscious and unconscious U.S. efforts did result in emphasis on conventional forces (at the expense of paramilitary forces) "governed by the concept of a war front enabling use of the superior weaponry and technology of the West against a guerrilla force that was potentially the spearhead of a more massive thrust out of North Vietnam." 114/

1. Evolution of the mission of the VNA has been described. The fact is that assignment of a dual mission to VNA led rapidly to formation of a regular military establishment designed primarily to counter the threat of overt invasion from the North. Countering the internal threat--as is so often the case--was downgraded to the status of a "lesser-included capability in the regular forces." 115/

2. The strategy of the regular establishment was described as early as 1956 as

defensive in nature and involves the conduct of a delaying action against external aggression of sufficient duration and effectiveness to hold as much ground as possible, and retain the key strategic entity, the Saigon Complex, in order to permit the arrival of the foreign military assistance which will be necessary to preserve her territorial integrity and national sovereignty .... This defensive strategy must not only include consideration of the enemy threat in the form of overt military aggression from outside her borders but also from separate or concurrent extensive guerrilla and clandestine activities conducted by indigenous dissident groups or foreign military and political cadres already present or infiltrated into the country. 116/

The latter threat was countered by the territorial regiments in 1956; these regiments were abolished in 1959, with the advent of the 7 standard division force. Thus on the strategic level the regular forces came to reflect the strategy evolved by the U.S. in Korea and elsewhere.

3. On the tactical level the Vietnamese forces also came to reflect standard U.S. doctrine--with one possible exception, that of "pacification."

Thus the tactical doctrine which will probably emerge from the present [1956] reorganization and training period will most likely

reflect past, relatively small-unit, infantry-type operations under the French; the inherently mobile infantry nature of the present forces influenced by increased firepower; a capability for coordinated operations up to division and eventually corps level; and increased service and logistical support for the essentially infantry-type forces. Mobility and increased infantry firepower will dictate the utilization of essentially infantry tactics.... The VNA will adopt a highly mobile tactical doctrine characterized by extensive movement and maneuvering of the main body with extensive mining and ambushes. 117

The preponderant evidence gleaned from ARVN experience against the Viet Cong supports the hypothesis that ARVN tactics, influenced by the factors listed above, rapidly evolved toward relatively large-scale operations, heavily reliant on increased firepower including artillery and air support, and away from "relatively small-unit, infantry-type operations," again reflecting U.S. practice, if not U.S. doctrine, in countering large-scale aggression.

The concept and tactics of the pacification mission, unlike those of countering aggression, required particular concentration on specialized methods of dealing with the local populace as well as countering insurgents. Thus the Saigon Military Mission reported that as a result of its teaching efforts,

Troops were courteous, they had constructed a school and were holding classes for both children and adults with Army volunteers as teachers, they had helped rebuild the marketplace and church, they carried out active patrolling, and they had placed locked boxes to receive information and suggestions from the population. People responded to the treatment. In a few days they started being friendly with the troops (something usually reserved for Communist troops in Asian countries) and, after a Viet Minh hand-grenade attack on the marketplace, information about names and locations of the Viet Minh cadres started to flow to the Army from the people. 118

In spite of this apparent good start, MAAG Country Statements from 1955 to 1959 are silent on the subject of training for pacification, although National Security Action, as pacification was then called, was actually underway. This is a reasonably good indication of how important this set of concepts and tactics was regarded by MAAG officers. 119 In fact, quite the opposite was the case: MAAG reports constantly complained of the diversion of the Vietnamese Army from unit training to pacification, without suggesting that specialized training in the tactics of this mission might be useful. 119 The clear inference is that the orthodoxy of U.S. tactical doctrine prevailed.

4. The organization of the defense establishment in general reflected the U.S. practices insofar as it was feasible to persuade the Diem



government to adopt them. 120/ Available evidence indicates that the standard ARVN division of 1959 was patterned after the 1956 U.S. Army division-- reduced in scale, and without organic armor, aviation, and band.

Each ARVN standard division had 10,450 men organized in three regiments, each of which was capable of independent action and could be broken into company-size task forces. Each division had two artillery battalions equipped with towed 105 mm howitzers and 4.2" mortars, one engineer battalion, and technical and logistics support companies. The seven divisions were formed into two Corps. There were also four armor battalions, one airborne brigade, one marine group, one air force fighter-bomber squadron, two C-47 transport squadrons, two light aircraft observation squadrons, and one squadron of helicopters. 121/

In 1964 Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams (Chief MAAG Vietnam 1955-60) during the course of an interview was asked whether MAAG had created the Vietnamese Division in the image of the American Division. His vehement denial included the statement that "Actually, there was little similarity between the South Vietnamese division in existence then [1959] or now [1964]." 122/ However, an examination of the following table and figures indicates that there were more similarities than differences in the overall structure of the two organizations. All of the technical services were to be found in the 1959 ARVN Division, although at somewhat reduced strength in some cases. Division artillery was 50 percent heavier in the U.S. Division and was concentrated in 105 mm howitzer battalions with some 155 mm, 8-inch and 763 mm weapons. The ARVN Division had a 4.2-inch mortar battalion in addition to the 105 mm battalion. Maneuver units, the regiments of the U.S. and ARVN Division, were about equal in strength. Both regiments contained a mortar company. There were more regiments in the U.S. Division (5) as opposed to ARVN's 3, and the U.S. regiments were divided into rifle companies (4 per regiment). In the ARVN Division there was an intermediate battalion echelon. In this respect the 1959 ARVN Division more closely resembled the 7-11R Regiment of the U.S. Army 7R Division (1955). This regiment type was heavier than both the ROCID 7-11T Infantry Regiment and the ARVN 1959 Regiment and was evidently capable of more sustained operations, since it had organic support units attached to it including a company of tanks. A similar regiment (7-11R) without the technical support units was supposed to provide the division with the flexibility to conduct operation with task forces of any size, a stated goal of the authors of the ARVN Divisional reorganization. 123/ Thus, while the mirror image accusation is not entirely correct, neither is the denial that there were no similarities between the U.S. and ARVN Division. The evidence available suggests that clearly the blueprint for the 1959 ARVN Division reorganization was to be found in the TOE's of the U.S. Army.

5. Manpower policies in Vietnam in the late 1950's resulted in allocation of the best personnel to the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

COMPARISON OF U.S. 7T ROCID INFANTRY DIVISION (1956) AND  
ARVN STANDARD DIVISION (1959) (U)

Item or Unit	U.S. 7T ROCID Inf Div 1956			ARVN 1959 Inf Div		
	Have		Strength	Have		Strength
	Yes	No		Yes	No	
Division Total Strength			13,748			11,076
Div Hq & Hq Co						
Tank Bn	x		292	x		186
Arm'd Car Bn	x		763		x	
Engineer Combat Bn	x		669		x	
Signal	x		791			
Division Arty	x		Bn 525	x		466
105 mm How Bn	x		1,763	x		Co 164
4.2" Mortar Bn	x		897	x		976
	.	x	-	x		420
						551
Infantry Regiment						
Hq & Hq Spt Co	x		7,135	x		7,353
Rifle Co	x		1,550	x		a
Heavy Mort 81 mm	x		4,860	x		a
	x		725	x		a
Hq & Hq Det & Band						
Quartermaster Company	x		70		x	
Medical	x		194			65
Ordnance	x		Bn-302	x		Co 151
Combat Aviation Co	x		Bn-327	x		Co 114
Administrative Service Co	x		223		x	
Transportation	x		162			
	x		Bn 532	x		Co 105
					x	1100 c.v

<sup>a</sup>Not known.

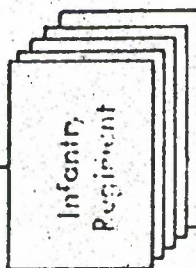
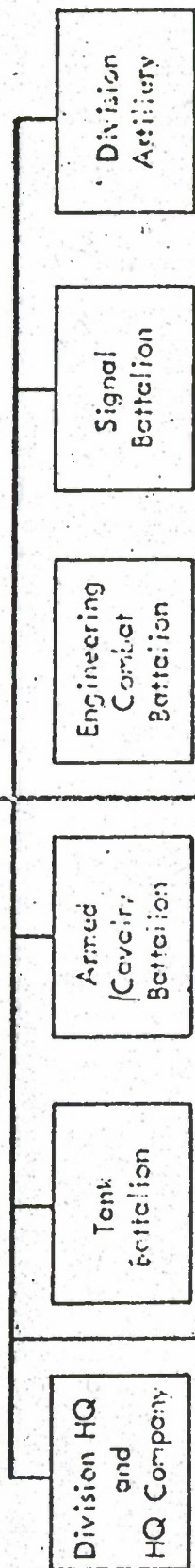
[Source: Infantry Reference Data, 1958 (U); Weekly Intelligence Digest, PACOM, 3-28-58, p. 15 (S)]



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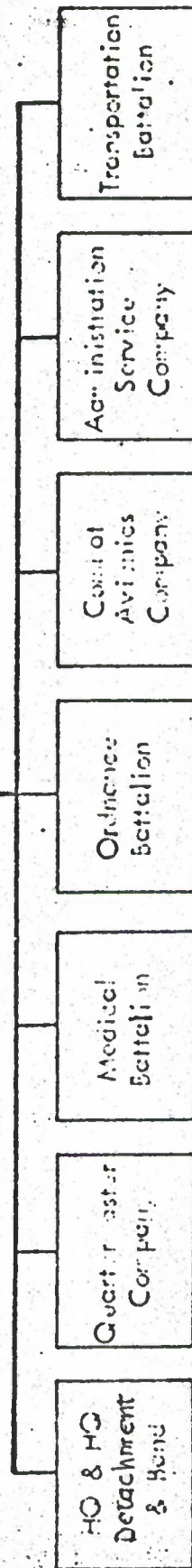
# INFANTRY

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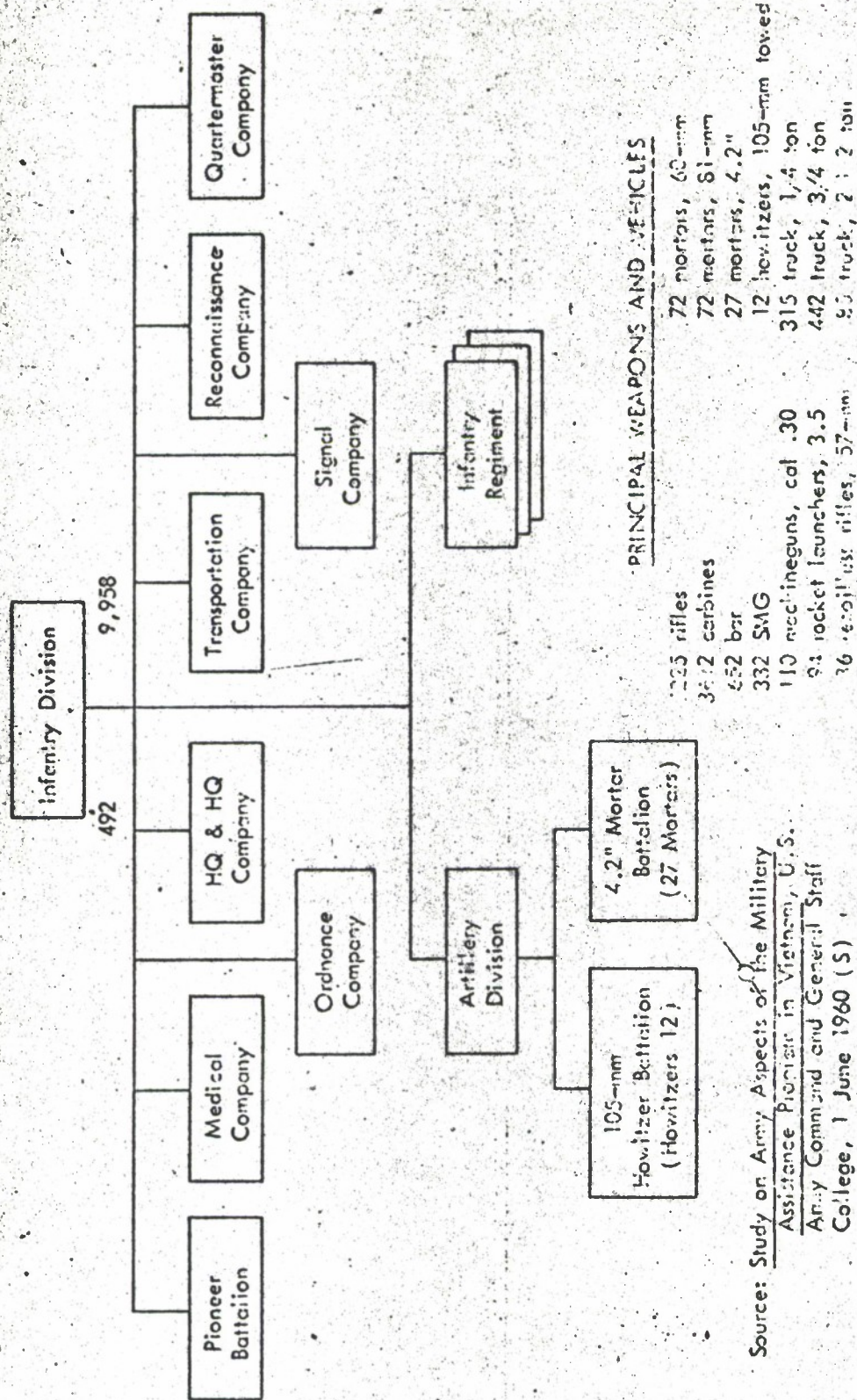
## TRAINS

## DIVISION



Source: Infantry Reference Data, 1958.

U.S. Infantry Division TOE 7T ROCID, (20 December 1956)



Source: Study on Army Aspects of the Military Assistance Pioneer in Vietnam, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 June 1960 (S)

ARVN Reorganized Infantry Division, 1959  
(standard ARVN division)



Rational direction of manpower was not proposed by American advisors and would have lain beyond the capacity for organization of the RVN Government; all young professional graduates were enlisted into the army, which then controlled most of the manpower to do the jobs and had to be allowed to make good the civilian shortcomings engendered by conscription. 121/

This insatiable requirement for the "best" men to build up the officer corps was in part a reflection of the requirements of the South Vietnamese social structure; in any event, it was much closer to the conventional U.S. view of an officer corps than to the view of Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, and reflected the view that well-schooled men are required to manage complex modern armies.

6. The equipment provided the Vietnamese regular forces was more suited to countering aggression from the North than to preserving internal security in the South. While ARVN were not equipped as heavily as those of the U.S.--they had no tracked vehicles (tanks or personnel carriers), fewer trucks, and generally lighter weapons--727 trucks, 660 trailers--to make them mechanized and road-bound. Armor was provided, but was not organic to the standard division.

...U.S. military aid was programmed in more or less the same fashion as for countries like Turkey and Korea, where guerrillas were not a threat. The Vietnamese armed forces not only were equipped with tanks, planes, artillery and similar hardware that was relatively little value against guerrillas as the French had discovered so painfully and the Pentagon apparently had not noticed. They were also trained to depend on that kind of big bang support in battle, reducing both their capability and their psychological willingness to get out and fight the guerrillas the only way that works: with rifles, close in. 125/

7. That the training of the Vietnamese armed forces was conducted along U.S. lines has been documented above. Between 1950 and 1959:

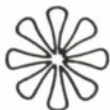
(1) 3,296 Vietnamese military personnel had received training in military facilities in the United States, while 747 had been trained in other Free World military schools. 126/

(2) Training films, manuals and lesson plans were those used by the U.S. military adapted to Vietnamese culture and environment. 127/

(3) The U.S. was particularly proud of its accomplishments in the training of armed forces in Korea, where a large conventionally organized force had proven itself in the combat recently experienced there. 128/

These factors, then--the dual mission, strategy, tactics, organization, manpower policy, equipment, and training--all directly contributed to the formation of a Vietnamese military establishment, and in particular to an ARVN, that in 1960 bore overall resemblance to the U.S. military establishment and particularly close resemblance to the U.S. Army. Unfortunately, events since 1960 have demonstrated that the ARVN was not well-suited to countering the internal security threat; its efficacy against overt aggression still remains to be tested.





# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV. A. 5.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

ORIGINS OF THE INSURGENCY

1954 - 1960

ORIGINS OF THE INSURGENCY

1954 - 1960

Foreword

This portion of the study probes the causes of the conflict in Vietnam in which the United States became ever more directly and deeply involved. Four monographs discuss, successively, the waning of the peace established at Geneva in 1954, the extent to which the war was an internal revolt against the government in South Vietnam, the role of North Vietnam in fomenting the insurgency, and the U.S. response through the Eisenhower Administration, 1954-1960. The summary paper presents the salient points in all four. At the front of each, at the tab, there is a table of contents and outline; footnotes are at the rear of each monograph.

SUMMARY

- TAB 1. Failure of the Geneva Settlement
2. Rebellion Against My-Diem
  3. The Role of Hanoi
  4. U.S. Perceptions of the Insurgency,  
1954 - 1960



## ORIGINS OF THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1954-1960

### SUMMARY

From the perspective of the United States, the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam raise four principal questions:

1. Was the breakdown of the peace of 1954 the fault of the U.S., or of the ambiguities and loopholes of the Geneva Accords?
2. Was the insurgency in essence an indigenous rebellion against Ngo Dinh Diem's oppressive government, transformed by the intervention of first the U.S., and then the DRV?
3. Or was it, rather, instigated, controlled, and supported from its inception by Hanoi?
4. When did the U.S. become aware of the Viet Cong threat to South Vietnam's internal security, and did it attempt to counter it with its aid?

The analysis which follows rests on study of three corpora of evidence:

(a) Intelligence reports and analyses, including the most carefully guarded finished intelligence, and pertinent National Intelligence Estimates.

(b) Unfinished governmental intelligence, field reports, and memoranda such as interrogations of prisoners and translated captured documents, as well as contract studies based on similar evidence.

(c) Open sources, including the works of former U.S. officials, Vietnam correspondents, and the like.

The U.S. has attempted to amplify (c) by publishing White Papers in 1961 and 1965, in which substantial citations were made from (b) and interpretations offered consistent with (a). This study has benefited from further effort during 1967 and early 1968 to identify in (b) evidence which could be publicly released. But, based on the survey of (a), (b), and (c) reported on below, the U.S. can now present no conclusive answers to the questions advanced above.

Tentative answers are possible, and form a continuum: By 1956, peace in Vietnam was plainly less dependent upon the Geneva Settlement than upon power relationships in Southeast Asia -- principally upon the role the U.S. elected to play in unfolding events. In 1957 and 1958, a structured rebellion against the government of Ngo Dinh Diem began. While the North Vietnamese played an ill-defined part, most of those who took up arms were South Vietnamese, and the causes for which they fought were by no means contrived in North Vietnam. In 1959 and 1960, Hanoi's involvement in the developing strife became evident. Not until 1960, however, did the U.S. perceive that Diem was in serious danger of being overthrown and devise a Counterinsurgency Plan.

It can be established that there was endemic insurgency in South Vietnam throughout the period 1954-1960. It can also be established -- but less surely -- that the Diem regime alienated itself from one after another of those elements within Vietnam which might have offered it political support, and was grievously at fault in its rural programs. That these conditions engendered animosity toward the GVN seems almost certain, and they could have underwritten a major resistance movement even without North Vietnamese help.

It is equally clear that North Vietnamese communists operated some form of subordinate apparatus in the South in the years 1954-1960. Nonetheless, the Viet Minh "stay-behinds" were not directed originally to structure an insurgency, and there is no coherent picture of the extent or effectiveness of communist activities in the period 1956-1959. From all indications, this was a period of reorganization and recruiting by the communist party. No direct links have been established between Hanoi and perpetrators of rural violence. Statements have been found in captured party histories that the communists plotted and controlled the entire insurgency, but these are difficult to take at face value. Bernard Fall ingeniously correlated DRV complaints to the ICC of incidents in South Vietnam in 1957 with GVN reports of the same incidents, and found Hanoi suspiciously well informed. He also perceived a pattern in the terrorism of 1957-1959, deducing that a broad, centrally directed strategy was being implemented. However, there is little other corroborative evidence that Hanoi instigated the incidents, much less orchestrated them.

Three interpretations of the available evidence are possible:

Option A -- That the DRV intervened in the South in reaction to U.S. escalation, particularly that of President Kennedy in early 1961. Those who advance this argument rest their case principally on open sources to establish the reprehensible character of the Diem regime, on examples of forceful resistance to Diem independent of Hanoi, and upon the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) alleged to have come into being in South Vietnam in early 1960. These also rely heavily upon DRV official statements of 1960-1961 indicating that the DRV only then proposed to support the NLF.



Option B -- The DRV manipulated the entire war. This is the official U.S. position, and can be supported. Nonetheless, the case is not wholly compelling, especially for the years 1955-1959.

Option C -- The DRV seized an opportunity to enter an ongoing internal war in 1959 prior to, and independent of, U.S. escalation. This interpretation is more tenable than the previous; still, much of the evidence is circumstantial.

The judgment offered here is that the truth lies somewhere between Option B and C. That is, there was some form of DRV apparatus functioning in the South throughout the years, but it can only be inferred that this apparatus originated and controlled the insurgency which by 1959 posed a serious challenge to the Diem government. Moreover, up until 1958, neither the DRV domestic situation nor its international support was conducive to foreign adventure; by 1959, its prospects were bright in both respects, and it is possible to demonstrate its moving forcefully abroad thereafter. Given the paucity of evidence now, well after the events, U.S. intelligence served policy makers of the day surprisingly well in warning of the developments described below:

#### Failure of the Geneva Settlement (Tab 1)

The Geneva Settlement of 1954 was inherently flawed as a durable peace for Indochina, since it depended upon France, and since both the U.S. and the Republic of South Vietnam excepted themselves. The common ground from which the nations negotiated at the Geneva Conference was a mutual desire to halt the hostilities between France and the Viet Minh, and to prevent any widening of the war. To achieve concord, they had to override objections of the Saigon government, countenance the disassociation of the U.S. from the Settlement, and accept France as one executor. Even so, Geneva might have wrought an enduring peace for Vietnam if France had remained as a major power in Indochina, if Ngo Dinh Diem had cooperated with the terms of the Settlement, if the U.S. had abstained from further influencing the outcome. No one of these conditions was likely, given France's travail in Algeria, Diem's implacable anti-communism, and the U.S.' determination to block further expansion of the DRV in Southeast Asia.

Therefore, the tragedy staged: partition of Vietnam, the sole negotiable basis found at Geneva for military disengagement, became the prime casus belli. To assuage those parties to Geneva who were reluctant to condone the handing over of territory and people to a communist government, and to reassure the Viet Minh that their southern followers could be preserved en bloc, the Accords provided for regrouping forces to North and South Vietnam and for Vietnamese freely electing residence in either the North or the South; the transmigrations severely disrupted the polity of Vietnam, heated the controversy over reunification, and made it possible for North Vietnam to contemplate subversive aggression. The arms control provisions of the Settlement of 1954 mollified parties

of both sides who were fearful that the armistice would be used to conceal construction of military bases or other preparations for aggression; but these provisions depended on a credible international supervision which never materialized. Partition and regroupment pitted North against South Vietnam, and arms control failed patently and soon. Geneva traded on long-run risks to achieve short-run disengagement. France withdrew from Vietnam, leaving the Accords in the hands of Saigon. Lasting peace came between France and the Viet Minh, but the deeper struggle for an independent, united Vietnam remained, its international implications more grave, its dangers heightened.

The Southeast Asia policy of the U.S. in the aftermath of the Geneva Conference was conservative, focused on organizing collective defense against further inroads of communism, not on altering status quo. Status quo was the two Vietnams set up at Geneva, facing each other across a demilitarized zone. Hanoi, more than other powers, had gambled: hedged by the remaining Viet Minh, it waited for either Geneva's general elections or the voracious political forces in the South to topple the Saigon government. In South Vietnam, Diem had begun his attempt to gain control over his people, constantly decried DRV subversion and handling of would-be migrants as violations of the Geneva Accords, and pursued an international and domestic policy of anti-communism. Both Vietnams took the view that partition was, as the Conference Final Declaration stated, only temporary. But statements could not gainsay the practical import of the Accords. The separation of Vietnam at the 17th parallel facilitated military disengagement, but by establishing the principle that two regimes were separately responsible for "civil administration" each in distinct zones; by providing for the regroupment of military forces to the two zones, and for the movement of civilians to the zone of their choice; and by postponing national elections for at least two years, permitting the regimes in Hanoi and Saigon to consolidate power, the Geneva conferees in fact fostered two governments under inimical political philosophies, foreign policies, and socio-economic systems.

The Geneva powers were imprecise -- probably deliberately indefinite -- concerning who was to carry out the election provisions. France, which was charged with civil administration in the "regrouping zone" of South Vietnam, had granted the State of Vietnam its independence in June 1954, six weeks before the Accords were drawn up. Throughout 1954 and the first half of 1955, France further divested itself of authority in South Vietnam: police, local government, and then the Army of Vietnam were freed of French control, and turned over to the Saigon government. Concurrently, the U.S. began to channel aid directly to South Vietnam, rather than through France. The convolution of French policy then thrust upon the U.S. a choice between supporting Diem or the French presence in Indochina. The U.S. opted for Diem. By the time the deadlines for election consultations fell due in July 1955, South Vietnam was sovereign de facto as well as de jure, waxing strong with U.S. aid, and France was no longer in a position to exert strong influence on Diem's policy or actions.



As early as January 1955, President Diem was stating publicly that he was unlikely to proceed with the Geneva elections:

"Southern Viet-Nam, since it protested the Geneva Agreement when it was made, does not consider itself a party to that Agreement, nor bound by it.

"In any event, the clauses providing for the 1956 elections are extremely vague. But at one point they are clear -- in stipulating that the elections are to be free. Everything will now depend on how free elections are defined. The President said he would wait to see whether the conditions of freedom would exist in North Viet-Nam at the time scheduled for the elections. He asked what would be the good of an impartial counting of votes if the voting has been preceded in North Viet-Nam by a campaign of ruthless propaganda and terrorism on the part of a police state." \*

As the deadline for consultations approached (20 July 1955), Diem was increasingly explicit that he did not consider free elections possible in North Vietnam, and had no intention of consulting with the DRV concerning them. The U.S. did not -- as is often alleged -- connive with Diem to ignore the elections. U.S. State Department records indicate that Diem's refusal to be bound by the Geneva Accords and his opposition to pre-election consultations were at his own initiative. However, the U.S., which had expected elections to be held, and up until May 1955 had fully supported them, shifted its position in the face of Diem's opposition, and of the evidence then accumulated about the oppressive nature of the regime in North Vietnam. "In essence," a State Department historical study found, "our position would be that the whole subject of consultations and elections in Viet-Nam should be left up to the Vietnamese themselves and not dictated by external arrangements which one of the parties never accepted and still rejects." \*\* Secretary of State Dulles explained publicly that:

"Neither the United States Government nor the Government of Viet-Nam is, of course, a party to the Geneva armistice agreements. We did not sign them, and the Government of Viet-Nam did not sign them and, indeed, protested against them. On the other hand, the United States believes, broadly speaking, in the unification of countries which have a historic unity, where the people are akin. We also believe that, if there are conditions of really free elections, there is no serious risk that the Communists would win. . . ." \*\*\*

\* Interview with Max Lerner, transcript in OSD files, dated 24 Jan 55. Cf., "Vietnam Demands a Time Extension," New York Times, 23 Jan 55.

\*\* U.S. Department of State, "The Shift in the United States Position Toward Vietnamese Elections Under the Geneva Accords" (RM-765), 1 Sep 65.

\*\*\* Press Conference, 28 June 55.

Thus, backed by the U.S., Diem obdurately refused to open talks with the Hanoi government. He continued to maintain that the Government of South Vietnam had not signed the Geneva Agreements and thus was not bound by them.

"Our policy is a policy for peace. But nothing will lead us astray of our goal, the unity of our country, a unity in freedom and not in slavery. Serving the cause of our nation, more than ever we will struggle for the reunification of our homeland.

"We do not reject the principle of free elections as peaceful and democratic means to achieve that unity. However, if elections constitute one of the bases of true democracy, they will be meaningful only on the condition that they be absolutely free.

"Now, faced with a regime of oppression as practiced by the Viet Minh, we remain skeptical concerning the possibility of fulfilling the conditions of free elections in the North." \*

On 1 June 1956, the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Walter Robertson, stated:

"President Diem and the Government of Free Viet-Nam reaffirmed on April 6 of this year and on other occasions their desire to seek the reunification of Viet-Nam by peaceful means. In this goal, we support them fully. We hope and pray that the partition of Viet-Nam, imposed against the will of the Vietnamese people, will speedily come to an end. For our part we believe in free elections, and we support President Diem fully in his position that if elections are to be held, there first must be conditions which preclude intimidation or coercion of the electorate. Unless such conditions exist there can be no free choice." \*\*

President Eisenhower is widely quoted to the effect that in 1954 as many as 80% of the Vietnamese people would have voted for Ho Chi Minh, as the popular hero of their liberation, in an election against Bao Dai. In October 1955, Diem ran against Bao Dai in a referendum and won -- by a dubiously overwhelming vote, but he plainly won nevertheless. It is almost certain that by 1956 the proportion which might have voted for Ho -- in a free election against Diem -- would have been much smaller than 80%. Diem's success in the South had been far greater than anyone could have foreseen, while the North Vietnamese regime had been suffering from food scarcity, and low public morale

\* Radio Broadcast by Premier Diem, 16 July 1955.

\*\* American Friends of Vietnam, America's Stake in Vietnam (New York: Carnegie Press, 1956), 15 ff.



stemming from inept imitation of Chinese Communism -- including a harsh agrarian program that reportedly led to the killing of over 50,000 small-scale "landlords." The North Vietnamese themselves furnished damning descriptions of conditions within the DRV in 1955 and 1956. Vo Nguyen Giap, in a public statement to his communist party colleagues, admitted in autumn, 1956, that:

"We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread. . . . Whilst carrying out our land reform program we failed to respect the principles of freedom of faith and worship in many areas. . . in regions inhabited by minority tribes we have attacked tribal chiefs too strongly, thus injuring, instead of respecting, local customs and manners. . . . When reorganizing the party, we paid too much importance to the notion of social class instead of adhering firmly to political qualifications alone. Instead of recognizing education to be the first essential, we resorted exclusively to organizational measures such as disciplinary punishments, expulsion from the party, executions, dissolution of party branches and calls. Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization." \*

That circumstances in North Vietnam were serious enough to warrant Giap's confiteor was proved by insurrection among Catholic peasants in November 1956, within two weeks of his speech, in which thousands more lives were lost. But the uprisings, though then and since used to validate the U.S.-backed GVN stand, were not foreseen in 1955 or 1956; the basis for the policy of both nations in rejecting the Geneva elections was, rather, convictions that Hanoi would not permit "free general elections by secret ballot," and that the ICC would be impotent in supervising the elections in any case.

The deadlines for the consultations in July 1955, and the date set for elections in July 1956, passed without international action. The DRV repeatedly tried to engage the Geneva machinery, forwarding messages to the Government of South Vietnam in July 1955, May and June 1956, March 1958, July 1959, and July 1960, proposing consultations to negotiate "free general elections by secret ballot," and to liberalize North-South relations in general. Each time the GVN replied with disdain, or with silence. The 17th parallel, with its demilitarized zone on either side, became de facto an international boundary, and -- since Ngo Dinh Diem's rigid refusal to traffic with the North excluded all economic exchanges and even an interstate postal agreement -- one of the most restricted boundaries in the world. The DRV appealed to the UK and the USSR as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference to no avail. In January 1956, on DRV urging, Communist China requested another

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\* General Vo Nguyen Giap, speaking to the 10th Congress of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee, October 1956.

Geneva Conference to deal with the situation. But the Geneva Co-Chairmen, the USSR and the UK, responded only by extending the functions of the International Control Commission beyond its 1956 expiration date. By early 1957, partitioned Vietnam was a generally accepted modus vivendi throughout the international community. For instance, in January 1957, the Soviet Union proposed the admission of both the GVN and the DRV to the United Nations, the USSR delegate to the Security Council declaring that "in Vietnam two separate States existed, which differed from one another in political and economic structure. . . ." Thus, reunification through elections became as remote a prospect in Vietnam as in Korea or Germany. If the political mechanism for reunifying Vietnam in 1956 proved impractical, the blame lies at least in part with the Geneva conferees themselves, who postulated an ideal political settlement incompatible with the physical and psychological dismemberment of Vietnam they themselves undertook in July 1954.

But partition was not, as the examples of Korea and Germany demonstrate, necessarily tantamount to renewed hostilities. The difference was that in Korea and Germany international forces guarded the boundaries. In Vietnam, the withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps prior to the date set for elections in 1956 left South Vietnam defenseless except for such forces as it could train and equip with U.S. assistance. The vague extending of the SEATO aegis over Vietnam did not exert the same stabilizing influence as did NATO's Central Army Group in Germany, or the United Nations Command in Korea. Moreover, neither East Germany nor North Korea enjoyed the advantage of a politico-military substructure within the object of its irredentism, as the Viet Minh residue provided North Vietnam. The absence of deterrent force in South Vietnam invited forceful reunification; the southern Viet Minh regroupes in the North and their comrades in the South made it possible.

Pursuant to the "regroupment" provisions of the Geneva Accords, some 190,000 troops of the French Expeditionary Corps, and 900,000 civilians moved from North Vietnam to South Vietnam; more than 100,000 Viet Minh soldiers and civilians moved from South to North. Both nations thereby acquired minorities with vital interests in the outcome of the Geneva Settlement. In both nations, the regroupes exerted an influence over subsequent events well out of proportion to their numbers.

In North Vietnam, the DRV treated the southern regroupes from the outset as strategic assets -- the young afforded special schooling, the able assigned to separate military units.

The southerners in the North, and their relatives in the South, formed, with the remnants of the Viet Minh's covert network in South Vietnam, a means through which the DRV might "struggle" toward reunification regardless of Diem's obduracy or U.S. aid for South Vietnam. These people kept open the DRV's option to launch aggression without transcending a



"civil war" of southerners against southerners -- no doubt an important consideration with the United States as a potential antagonist. The evidence indicates that, at least through 1956, Hanoi did not expect to have to resort to force; thereafter, the regroupes occupied increasing prominence in DRV plans.

For Diem's government, refugees from the North were important for three reasons: firstly, they provided the world the earliest convincing evidence of the undemocratic and oppressive nature of North Vietnam's regime. Though no doubt many migrants fled North Vietnam for vague or spurious reasons, it was plain that Ho's Viet Minh were widely and genuinely feared, and many refugees took flight in understandable terror. There were indications that the DRV forcefully obstructed the migration of other thousands who might also have left the North. In 1955 and 1956, the refugees were the most convincing support for Diem's argument that free elections were impossible in the DRV.

Secondly, the refugees engaged the sympathies of the American people as few developments in Vietnam have before or since, and solidly underwrote the U.S. decision for unstinting support of Diem. The poignancy of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes and fortunes to escape communist tyranny, well journalized, evoked an outpouring of U.S. aid, governmental and private. The U.S. Navy was committed to succor the migrants, lifting over 300,000 persons in "Operation EXODUS" (in which Dr. Tom Dooley -- then a naval officer -- won fame). U.S. government-to-government aid, amounting to \$100 per refugee, more than South Vietnam's annual income per capita, enabled Diem's government to provide homes and food for hundreds of thousands of the destitute, and American charities provided millions of dollars more for their relief. U.S. officials defending American aid programs could point with pride to the refugee episode to demonstrate the special eligibility of the Vietnamese for U.S. help, including an early, convincing demonstration that Diem's government could mount an effective program with U.S. aid.

Thirdly, the predominantly Catholic Tonkinese refugees provided Diem with a clique: a politically malleable, culturally distinct group, wholly distrustful of Ho Chi Minh and the DRV, dependent for subsistence on Diem's government, and attracted to Diem as a co-religionist. Under Diem's mandarin regime, they were less important as dependable votes than as a source of reliable political and military cadres. Most were kept unassimilated in their own communities, and became prime subjects for Diem's experiments with strategic population relocation. One heritage of Geneva is the present dominance of South Vietnam's government and army by northerners. The refugees catalyzed Diem's domestic political rigidity, his high-handedness with the U.S., and his unyielding rejection of the DRV and the Geneva Accords.

The Geneva Settlement was further penalized by the early failure of the "International Supervisory Commission" established by the Armistice

Agreement (Article 3<sup>4</sup>) and cited in the Conference Declaration (Article 7). While a Joint Commission of French and Viet Minh military officers was set up to deal with the cease-fire and force regroupment, the International Commission for Supervision and Control (ICC), furnished by Poland, India, and Canada, was to oversee the Accords in general. Its inability to cope with violations of the Armistice in the handling of would-be migrants, vociferously proclaimed in both Saigon and Hanoi, impugned its competence to overwatch the general free elections, for which it was also to be responsible.

Equally serious for the Settlement, the ICC was expected to control arms and guarantee against aggression. The armistice agreement signed by the French and the Viet Minh, and affirmed in the several declarations of the Geneva Conference, included four main provisions for arms control: (1) arms, bases, and armed forces were to be fixed at the level existing in Vietnam in July 1954, with allowance for replacement of worn or damaged equipment, and rotation of personnel; (2) further foreign influences were to be excluded, either in the form of alliances, or foreign military bases established in either North or South Vietnam; (3) neither party was to allow its zone to be used for the renewal of aggression; and, (4) all the foregoing were to be overseen by the ICC. As was the case of the regroupment provisions, these arrangements operated in practice to the detriment of the political solution embodied in the Accords, for the ICC, the election guardian, was soon demonstrated to be impotent.

The level of arms in Vietnam in 1954 was unascertainable. The Viet Minh had been surreptitiously armed, principally by the Chinese, from 1950 onward. That Viet Minh forces were acquiring large amount of relatively advanced weaponry was fully evident at Dien Bien Phu, but neither the DRV nor its allies owed to this military assistance. After the 1954 armistice, French, U.S., and British intelligence indicated that the flow of arms into North Vietnam from China continued on a scale far in excess of "replacement" needs. Similarly, while U.S. military materiel had been provided to the French more openly, no one -- neither the French, the Vietnamese, the U.S., nor certainly the ICC -- knew how much of this equipment was on hand and serviceable after 1954. The issue of arms levels was further complicated by regroupment, French withdrawals, and the revamping of the national army in South Vietnam. The ICC could determine to no one's satisfaction whether the DRV was within its rights to upgrade the armament of the irregulars it brought out of South Vietnam. Similarly, though the DRV charged repeatedly that the U.S. had no right to be in South Vietnam at all, the ICC had to face the fact that U.S. military advisors and trainers had been present in Vietnam since 1950 under a pentilateral agreement with Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and France. If France withdrew its cadres in Vietnamese units, could they not be "replaced" by Americans? And if the French were withdrawing both men and equipment in large quantities, did not Vietnam have a right under the Accords to replace them in kind with its own, American-equipped formations? To DRV charges and GVN countercharges, the ICC



could reply with legalistic interpretations, but it found it virtually impossible to collect facts, or exercise more than vague influence over U.S., GVN, or DRV policy. The only major example of U.S.' ignoring the ICC was the instance of the U.S. Training and Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM), 350 men ostensibly deployed to Vietnam in 1956 to aid the Vietnamese in recovering equipment left by the French, but also directed to act as an extension of the existing MAAG by training Vietnamese in logistics. TERM was introduced without ICC sanction, although subsequently the ICC accepted its presence.

The question of military bases was similarly occluded. The DRV protested repeatedly that the U.S. was transforming South Vietnam into a military base for the prosecution of aggression in Southeast Asia. In fact, as ICC investigation subsequently established, there was no wholly U.S. base anywhere in South Vietnam. It was evident, however, that the South Vietnamese government had made available to the U.S. some portions of existing air and naval facilities -- e.g., at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Nha Be -- for the use of MAAG and TERM. ICC access to these facilities was restricted, and the ICC was never able to determine what the U.S. was shipping through them, either personnel or materiel. By the same token, ICC access to DRV airports, rail terminals, and seaports was severely limited, and its ability to confirm or deny allegations concerning the rearming of the People's Army of Vietnam correspondingly circumscribed. International apprehensions over arms levels and potential bases for aggression were heightened by statements anticipating South Vietnam's active participation in SEATO, or pronouncements of DRV solidarity with China and Russia.

Not until 1959 and 1961 did the ICC publish reports attempting to answer directly DRV charges that the U.S. and South Vietnam were flagrantly violating the arms control provisions of the Geneva Accords. Similarly, though in its Tenth and Eleventh Interim Reports (1960 and 1961) the ICC noted "the concern which the Republic of Vietnam has been expressing over the problem of subversion in South Vietnam," it did not mention that those expressions of concern had been continuous since 1954, or attempt to publish a factual study of that problem until June 1962. In both cases, the ICC was overtaken by events: by late 1960, international tensions were beyond any ability of the ICC to provide reassurances, and the U.S. was faced with the decision whether to commit major resources to the conflict in South Vietnam.

The Geneva Settlement thus failed to provide lasting peace because it was, as U.S. National Security Council papers of 1956 and 1958 aptly termed it, "only a truce." It failed to settle the role of the U.S. or of the Saigon government, or, indeed, of France in Vietnam. It failed because it created two antagonist Vietnamese nations. It failed because the Geneva powers were unwilling or unable to concert follow-up action in Vietnam to supervise effectively observance of the Accords,

or to dampen the mounting tension. Mutual distrust led to incremental violations by both sides, but on balance, though neither the United States nor South Vietnam was fully cooperative, and though both acted as they felt necessary to protect their interests, both considered themselves constrained by the Accords. There is no evidence that either deliberately undertook to breach the peace. In contrast, the DRV proceeded to mobilize its total societal resources scarcely without pause from the day the peace was signed, as though to substantiate the declaration of its Deputy Premier, Pham Van Dong, at the closing session of the Geneva Conference:

"We shall achieve unity. We shall achieve it just as we have won the war. No force in the world, internal or external, can make us deviate from our path . . ."

Diem's rejection of elections meant that reunification could be achieved in the foreseeable future only by resort to force. Diem's policy, and U.S. support of it, led inevitably to a test of strength with the DRV to determine whether the GVN's cohesiveness, with U.S. support, could offset North Vietnam's drive to satisfy its unrequited nationalism and expansionism.

#### Revolt Against My-Diem (Tab 2)

By the time President Kennedy came to office in 1961, it was plain that support for the Saigon government among South Vietnam's peasants -- 90% of the population -- was weak and waning. The Manifesto of the National Liberation Front, published in December 1960, trumpeted the existence of a revolutionary organization which could channel popular discontent into a political program. Increasingly Diem's government proved inept in dealing either through its public administration with the sources of popular discontent, or through its security apparatus with the Viet Cong. Diem's government and his party were by that time manifestly out of touch with the people, and into the gap between the government and the populace the Viet Cong had successfully driven. When and why this gap developed is crucial to an understanding of who the Viet Cong were, and to what extent they represented South as opposed to North Vietnamese interests.

The U.S. Government, in its White Papers on Vietnam of 1961 and 1965\*, has blamed the insurgency on aggression by Hanoi, holding that the Viet Cong were always tools of the DRV. Critics of U.S. policy in Vietnam usually hold, to the contrary, that the war was started by South Vietnamese; their counterarguments rest on two propositions: (1) that the insurgency began as a rebellion against the oppressive and clumsy

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\* U.S. Department of State, "A Threat to the Peace: North Vietnam's Effort to Conquer South Vietnam" (Publication 7308, Far Eastern Series 110, December 1961) and "Aggression from the North: The Record of North Vietnam's Campaign to Conquer South Vietnam" (Publication 7839, Far Eastern Series 130, February 1965).



government of Ngo Dinh Diem; and (2) that only after it became clear, in late 1960, that the U.S. would commit massive resources to succor Diem in his internal war, was the DRV impelled to unleash the South Vietnamese Viet Minh veterans evacuated to North Vietnam after Geneva. French analysts have long been advancing such interpretations; American protagonists for them often quote, for example, Philippe Devillers, who wrote in 1962 that:

" . . . In 1959, responsible elements of the Communist Resistance in Indo-China came to the conclusion that they had to act, whether Hanoi wanted them to or no. They could no longer continue to stand by while their supporters were arrested, thrown into prison and tortured, without attempting to do anything about it as an organization, without giving some lead to the people in the struggle in which it was to be involved. Hanoi preferred diplomatic notes, but it was to find that its hand had been forced." \*

Devillers related how in March 1960 the "Nambo Veterans of the Resistance Association" issued a declaration appealing for "struggle" to "liberate themselves from submission to America, eliminate all U.S. bases in South Vietnam, expel American military advisors. . . ." and to end "the colonial regime and the fascist dictatorship of the Ngo family." \*\* Shortly thereafter, according to Devillers, a People's Liberation Army appeared in Cochinchina and:

"From this time forward it carried on incessant guerrilla operations against Diem's forces.

"It was thus by its home policy that the government of the South finally destroyed the confidence of the population, which it had won during the early years, and practically drove them into revolt and desperation. The non-Communist (and even the anti-Communist) opposition had long been aware of the turn events were taking. But at the beginning of 1960 very many elements, both civilian and military, in the Nationalist camp came to a clear realization that things were moving from bad to worse, and that if nothing were done to put an end to the absolute power of Diem, then Communism would end up by gaining power with the aid, or at least with the consent, of the population. If they did not want to allow the Communists to make capital out of the revolt, then they would have to oppose Diem actively. . . ." \*\*\*

Based on a similar analysis, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., held that:

\* Philippe Devillers, "The Struggle for the Unification of Vietnam," China Quarterly, No. 9, January-March 1962, 15-16.

\*\* "Declaration of Former Resistance Fighters," excerpts in Kahin and Lewis, op. cit., Appendix 5, 384-387.

\*\*\* Devillers, loc. cit.

"Diem's authoritarianism, which increasingly involved manhunts, political reeducation camps, and the 'regroupment' of population, caused spreading discontent and then armed resistance on the countryside. It is not easy to disentangle the events of these murky years; but few scholars believe that the growing resistance was at the start organized or directed by Hanoi. Indeed, there is some indication that the Communists at first hung back . . . it was not until September, 1960 that the Communist Party of North Vietnam bestowed its formal blessing and called for the liberation of the south from American imperialism." \*

Events in Vietnam in the years 1954 to 1960 were indeed murky. The Diem government controlled the press tightly, and discouraged realism in reports from its provincial bureaucracy. Even official U.S. estimates were handicapped by reliance upon GVN sources for inputs from the grass roots of Vietnamese society, the rural villages, since the U.S. advisory effort was then largely confined to top levels of the GVN and its armed forces. But enough evidence has now accumulated to establish that peasant resentment against Diem was extensive and well founded. Moreover, it is clear that dislike of the Diem government was coupled with resentment toward Americans. For many Vietnamese peasants, the War of Resistance against French-Bao Dai rule never ended; France was merely replaced by the U.S., and Bao Dai's mantle was transferred to Ngo Dinh Diem. The Viet Cong's opprobrious catchword "My-Diem" (American-Diem) thus recaptured the nationalist mystique of the First Indochina War, and combined the natural xenophobia of the rural Vietnamese with their mounting dislike of Diem. But Viet Cong slogans aside, in the eyes of many Vietnamese of no particular political persuasion, the United States was reprehensible as a modernizing force in a thoroughly traditional society, as the provider of arms and money for a detested government, and as an alien, disruptive influence upon hopes they held for the Geneva Settlement. As far as attitudes toward Diem were concerned, the prevalence of his picture throughout Vietnam virtually assured his being accepted as the sponsor of the frequently corrupt and cruel local officials of the GVN, and the perpetrator of unpopular GVN programs, especially the population relocation schemes, and the "Communist Denunciation Campaign." Altogether, Diem promised the farmers much, delivered little, and raised not only their expectations, but their fears.

It should be recognized, however, that whatever his people thought of him, Ngo Dinh Diem really did accomplish miracles, just as his American boosters said he did. He took power in 1954 amid political chaos, and within ten months surmounted attempted coups d'etat from within his army and rebellions by disparate irregulars. He consolidated his regime while providing creditably for an influx of nearly one million

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\* The Bitter Heritage, pp. 34-35.



destitute refugees from North Vietnam; and he did all of this despite active French opposition and vacillating American support. Under his leadership South Vietnam became well established as a sovereign state, by 1955 recognized de jure by 36 other nations. Moreover, by mid-1955 Diem secured the strong backing of the U.S. He conducted a plebiscite in late 1955, in which an overwhelming vote was recorded for him in preference to Bao Dai; during 1956 he installed a government -- representative in form, at least --, drafted a new constitution, and extended GVN control to regions that had been under sect or Viet Minh rule for a decade; and he pledged to initiate extensive reforms in land holding, public health, and education. With American help, he established a truly national, modern army, and formed rural security forces to police the countryside. In accomplishing all the foregoing, he confounded those Vietnamese of North and South, and those French, who had looked for his imminent downfall.

While it is true that his reforms entailed oppressive measures -- e.g., his "political reeducation centers" were in fact little more than concentration camps for potential foes of the government -- his regime compared favorably with other Asian governments of the same period in its respect for the person and property of citizens. There is much that can be offered in mitigation of Diem's authoritarianism. He began as the most singularly disadvantaged head of state of his era. His political legacy was endemic violence and virulent anti-colonialism. He took office at a time when the government of Vietnam controlled only a few blocks of downtown Saigon; the rest of the capital was the feudal fief of the Binh Xuyen gangster fraternity. Beyond the environs of Saigon, South Vietnam lay divided among the Viet Minh enclaves and the theocratic dominions of the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao sects. All these powers would have opposed any Saigon government, whatever its composition; in fact, their existence accounts for much of the confidence the DRV then exhibited toward the outcome of the Geneva Settlement. For Diem to have erected any central government in South Vietnam without reckoning resolutely with their several armed forces and clandestine organizations would have been impossible: they were the very stuff of South Vietnam's politics.

Diem's initial political tests reinforced his propensity to inflexibility. The lessons of his first 10 months of rule must have underscored to Diem the value of swift, tough action against dissent, and of demanding absolute personal loyalty of top officials. Also, by May 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem had demonstrated to his satisfaction that the U.S. was sufficiently committed to South Vietnam that he could afford on occasion to resist American pressure, and even to ignore American advice. Diem knew, as surely as did the United States, that he himself represented the only alternative to a communist South Vietnam.

Diem was handicapped in all his attempts to build a nation by his political concepts. He saw himself as a moral reformer; he talked affairs

of state with the extravagant expectations of a Rousseau, and he acted with the zeal of a Spanish Inquisitor. Despite extensive travel and education in the West, and despite his revolutionary mien, he remained what he had been raised: a mandarin of Imperial Hue, steeped in filial piety, devoted to Vietnam's past, modern only to the extent of an intense, conservative Catholicism. The political apparatus he created to extend his power and implement his programs reflected his background, personality, and experience: a rigidly organized, over-centralized familial oligarchy. Though his brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, created extensive personal political organizations of considerable power -- Nhu's semi-covert Can Lao party borrowed heavily from communist doctrine and technique -- and though a third brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was the ranking Catholic bishop, in no sense did they or Diem ever acquire a broad popular base for his government. Diem's personality and his political methods practically assured that he would remain distant, virtually isolated from the peasantry. They also seem to have predetermined that Diem's political history over the long-run would be a chronicle of disaffection: Diem alienated one after another of the key groups within South Vietnam's society until, by late 1960, his regime rested on the narrow and disintegrating base of its own bureaucracy and the northern refugees.

Such need not have been the case. At least through 1957, Diem and his government enjoyed marked success with fairly sophisticated pacification programs in the countryside. In fact, Diem at first was warmly welcomed in some former Viet Minh domains, and it is probable that a more sensitive and adroit leader could have captured and held a significant rural following. Even the failure of the Geneva Accords to eventuate in general elections in 1956 at first had little impact upon GVN pacification. The strident declamations of the DRV notwithstanding, reunification of partitioned Vietnam was not at first a vital political issue for South Vietnam's peasants. By and large, as late as 1961 as Devillers pointed out:

"For the people of the South reunification is not an essential problem. Peace, security, freedom, their standard of living, the agrarian question -- these are far more important questions to them. The stronghold of the sects over certain regions remains one of the factors of the situation, as is also, in a general fashion, the distrustful attitude of the Southerner towards the Northerner, who is suspected of a tendency to want to take charge of affairs." \*

The initial GVN pacification effort combined promises of governmental level reforms with "civic action" in the hamlets and villages. The latter was carried out by "cadre" clad in black pajamas, implementing the Maoist "three-withs" doctrine (eat with, sleep with, work with the people) to initiate rudimentary improvements in public health, education,

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\* Devillers, p. 19.



and local government, and to propagandize the promises of the central government. Unfortunately for Diem, his civic action teams had to be drawn from the northern refugees, and encountered Cochinchinese-Tonkinese tensions. More importantly, however, they incurred the enmity of the several Saigon ministries upon whose field responsibilities they impinged. Moreover, they became preoccupied with Diem's anti-communist campaign to the detriment of their social service. By the end of 1956, the civic action component of the GVN pacification program had been cut back severely.

But the salesmen were less at fault than their product. Diem's reform package compared unfavorably even in theory with what the Viet Minh had done by way of rural reform. Diem undertook to: (1) resettle refugees and other land destitute Vietnamese on uncultivated land beginning in 1955; (2) expropriate all rice land holdings over 247 acres and redistribute these to tenant farmers beginning in 1956; and (3) regulate landlord-tenant relations beginning in 1957 to fix rents within the range 15-25% of crop yield, and to guarantee tenant land tenure for 3-5 years. Despite invidious comparison with Viet Minh rent-free land, had these programs been honestly and efficiently implemented, they might have satisfied the land-hunger of the peasants. But they suffered, as one American expert put it from "lack of serious, interested administrators and top side command." Government officials, beginning with the Minister for Agrarian Reform, had divided loyalties, being themselves land holders. Moreover, the programs often operated to replace paternalistic landlords with competitive bidding, and thus increased, rather than decreased, tenant insecurity. And even if all Diem's goals had been honestly fulfilled -- which they were not -- only 20% of the rice land would have passed from large to small farmers. As it turned out, only 10% of all tenant farmers benefited in any sense. By 1959, the land reform program was virtually inoperative. As of 1960, 45% of the land remained concentrated in the hands of 2% of landowners, and 15% of the landlords owned 75% of all the land. Those relatively few farmers who did benefit from the program were more often than not northerners, refugees, Catholics, or Annamese -- so that land reform added to the GVN's aura of favoritism which deepened peasant alienation in Cochinchina. Farmer-GVN tensions were further aggravated by rumors of corruption, and the widespread allegation that the Diem family itself had become enriched through the manipulation of land transfers.

Diem's whole rural policy furnishes one example after another of political maladroitness. In June 1956, Diem abolished elections for village councils, apparently out of concern that large numbers of Viet Minh might win office. By replacing the village notables with GVN appointed officials, Diem swept away the traditional administrative autonomy of the village officials, and took upon himself and his government the onus for whatever corruption and injustice subsequently developed at that level. Again, the GVN appointees to village office

were outsiders -- northerners, Catholics, or other "dependable" persons -- and their alien presence in the midst of the close-knit rural communities encouraged revival of the conspiratorial, underground politics to which the villages had become accustomed during the resistance against the French.

But conspiracy was almost a natural defense after Diem launched his Denunciation of Communists Campaign, which included a scheme for classifying the populace into lettered political groups according to their connections with the Viet Minh. This campaign, which featured public confessions reminiscent of the "people's courts" of China and North Vietnam, invited neighbors to inform on each other, and raised further the premium on clandestine political activity. In 1956, the GVN disclosed that some 15-20,000 communists had been detained in its "political reeducation centers," while Devillers put the figure at 50,000. By GVN figures in 1960, nearly 50,000 had been detained. A British expert on Vietnam, P. J. Honey, who was invited by Diem to investigate the reeducation centers in 1959, concluded that, after interviewing a number of rural Vietnamese, "the consensus of the opinion expressed by these peoples is that . . . the majority of the detainees are neither communists nor pro-communists." Between 1956 and 1960, the GVN claimed that over 100,000 former communist cadres rallied to the GVN, and thousands of other communist agents had surrendered or had been captured. The campaign also allegedly netted over 100,000 weapons and 3,000 arms caches. Whatever it contributed to GVN internal security, however, the Communist Denunciation Campaign thoroughly terrified the Vietnamese peasants, and detracted significantly from the regime's popularity.

Diem's nearly paranoid preoccupation with security influenced his population relocation schemes. Even the refugee relief programs had been executed with an eye to building a "living wall" between the lowland centers of population and the jungle and mountain redoubts of dissidents. Between April 1957 and late 1961, the GVN reported that over 200,000 persons -- refugees and landless families from coastal Annam -- were resettled in 147 centers carved from 220,000 acres of wilderness. These "strategic" settlements were expensive: although they affected only 2% of South Vietnam's people, they absorbed 50% of U.S. aid for agriculture. They also precipitated unexpected political reactions from the Montagnard peoples of the Highlands. In the long run, by introducing ethnic Vietnamese into traditionally Montagnard areas, and then by concentrating Montagnards into defensible communities, the GVN provided the tribes with a cause and focused their discontent against Diem. The GVN thus facilitated rather than hindered the subsequent subversion of the tribes by the Viet Cong. But of all Diem's relocation experiments, that which occasioned the most widespread and vehement anti-GVN sentiment was the "agrovillage" program begun in mid-1959. At first, the GVN tried to establish rural communities which segregated families with known Viet Cong or Viet Minh connections from other citizens, but the public outcry caused this approach to be dropped. A few months later, the GVN announced



its intent to build 80 "prosperity and density centers" along a "strategic route system." By the end of 1963, each of these 80 agrovilles was to hold some 400 families, and each would have a group of satellite agrovilles of 120 families each. In theory, the agrovillage master plan was attractive: there were provisions for community defense, schools, dispensary, market center, public garden, and even electricity. Despite these advantages, however, the whole program incurred the wrath of the peasants. They resented the corvee labor the GVN resorted to for agrovillage construction, and they abhorred abandoning their cherished ancestral homes, tombs, and developed gardens and fields for a strange and desolate community. Passive peasant resistance, and then insurgent attacks on the agrovilles, caused abandonment of the program in early 1961 when it was less than 25% complete.

Yet, for all Diem's preoccupation with rural security, he poorly provided for police and intelligence in the countryside. Most of the American aid the GVN received was used for security, and the bulk of it was lavished on the Army of Vietnam. Security in the villages was relegated to the Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Guard (CG) -- poorly trained and equipped, miserably led. They could scarcely defend themselves, much less secure the farmers. Indeed, they proved to be an asset to insurgents in two ways: they served as a source of weapons; and their brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness induced innumerable villagers to join in open revolt against the GVN. The Army of Vietnam, after 1956, was withdrawn from the rural regions to undergo reorganization and modernization under its American advisors. Its interaction with the rural populace through 1959 was relatively slight. The SDC and CG, placed at the disposal of the provincial administrators, were often no more venal nor offensive to the peasants than the local officials themselves, but the corrupt, arrogant and overbearing men the people knew as the GVN were among the greatest disadvantages Diem faced in his rural efforts.

Nor was Ngo Dinh Diem successful in exercising effective leadership over the Vietnamese urban population or its intellectuals. Just as Diem and his brothers made the mistake of considering all former Viet Minh communists, they erred in condemning all non-Diemist nationalists as tools of Bao Dai or the French. The Diem family acted to circumscribe all political activity and even criticism not sanctioned by the oligarchy. In late 1957, newspapers critical of the regime began to be harassed, and in March 1958, after a caustic editorial, the GVN closed down the largest newspaper in Saigon. Attempts to form opposition political parties for participation in the national assembly met vague threats and bureaucratic impediments. In 1958, opposition politicians risked arrest for assaying to form parties unauthorized by Nhu or Can, and by 1959 all opposition political activity had come to a halt. In the spring of 1960, however, a group of non-communist nationalist leaders came together -- with more courage than prudence -- to issue the Caravelle Manifesto, a recital of grievances against the Diem regime.

Eleven of the 18 signers had been cabinet members under Diem or Bao Dai; 4 had been in other high government positions, and others represented religious groups. Their manifesto lauded Diem for the progress that he had made in the aftermath of Geneva, but pointed out that his repressions in recent years had "provoked the discouragement and resentment of the people." They noted that "the size of the territory has shrunk, but the number of civil servants has increased and still the work doesn't get done"; they applauded the fact that "the French Expeditionary Corps has left the country and a Republican Army has been constituted, thanks to American aid," but deplored the fact that the Diem influence "divides the men of one and the same unit, sows distrust between friends of the same rank, and uses as a criterion for promotion fidelity to the party in blind submission to its leaders"; they described, despairingly, "a rich and fertile country enjoying food surpluses" where "at the present time many people are out of work, have no roof over their heads, and no money." They went on to "beseech the government to urgently modify its policies." While the Caravelle Manifesto thoroughly frightened Diem, coming, as it did, three days after Syngman Rhee was overthrown in Korea, it prompted him only to further measures to quell the loyal opposition. By the fall of 1960, the intellectual elite of South Vietnam was politically mute; labor unions were impotent; loyal opposition in the form of organized parties did not exist. In brief, Diem's policies virtually assured that political challenges to him would have to be extra-legal. Ultimately, these emerged from the traditional sources of power in South Vietnam -- the armed forces, the religious sects, and the armed peasantry.

Through 1960, the only serious threats to Diem from inside the GVN were attempted military coups d'etat. In his first 10 months in office, Diem had identified loyalty in his top army commanders as a sine qua non for his survival. Thereafter he took a personal interest in the positioning and promoting of officers, and even in matters of military strategy and tactics. Many of Vietnam's soldiers found Diem's attentions a means to political power, wealth, and social prominence. Many others, however, resented those who rose by favoritism, and objected to Diem's interference in military matters. In November 1960, a serious coup attempt was supported by three elite paratroop battalions in Saigon, but otherwise failed to attract support. In the wake of the coup, mass arrests took place in which the Caravelle Group, among others, were jailed. In February 1962, two Vietnamese air force planes bombed the presidential palace in an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Diem and the Nhu's. Again, there was little apparent willingness among military officers for concerted action against Diem. But the abortive attempts of 1960 and 1962 had the effect of dramatizing the choices open to those military officers who recognized the insolvency of Diem's political and military policies.

Diem's handling of his military impinged in two ways on his rural policy. Diem involved himself with the equipping of his military forces,



showing a distinct proclivity toward heavy military forces of the conventional type. He wanted the Civil Guard equipped very much like his regular army -- possibly with a view to assuring himself a check on army power. There were a few soldiers, like General Duong Van Minh, who sharply disagreed with the President on this point. Nonetheless, Diem persisted. His increasing concern for the loyalty of key officials, moreover, led him to draw upon the military officer corps for civil administrators. From 1956 on his police apparatus was under military officers, and year by year, more of the provincial governments were also placed under military men. By 1958, about 1/3 of the province chiefs were military officers; by 1960, that fraction had increased to nearly 2/3; by 1962, 7/8 of all provinces were headed by soldiers.

Diem's bete noire was communism, and he appealed to threats from communists to justify his concentration on internal security. In August 1956, GVN Ordinance 47 defined being a communist, or working for them, as a capital crime. In May 1959, by GVN Law 10/59, the enforcement of Ordinance 47 was charged to special military tribunals from whose decisions there was no appeal. But "communist" was a term not used by members of the Marxist-Leninist Party headed by Ho Chi Minh, or its southern arms. Beginning in 1956, the Saigon press began to refer to "Viet Cong," a fairly precise and not necessarily disparaging rendition of "Vietnamese Communist." There is little doubt that Diem and his government applied the term Viet Cong somewhat loosely within South Vietnam to mean all persons or groups who resorted to clandestine political activity or armed opposition against his government; and the GVN meant by the term North as well as South Vietnamese communists, who they presumed acted in concert. At the close of the Franco-Viet Minh War in 1954, some 60,000 men were serving in organized Viet Minh units in South Vietnam. For the regroupments to North Vietnam, these units were augmented with large numbers of young recruits; a reported 90,000 armed men were taken to North Vietnam in the regroupment, while the U.S. and the GVN estimated that from 5-10,000 trained men were left behind as "cadre." If French estimates are correct that in 1954 the Viet Minh controlled over 60-90% of rural South Vietnam outside the sect domains, these 5-10,000 stay-behinds must have represented only a fraction of the Viet Minh residue, to which GVN figures on recanting and detained communists in the years through 1960 attest.

From studies of defectors, prisoners of war, and captured documents, it is now possible to assess armed resistance against Diem much better than the facts available at the time permitted. Three distinct periods are discernible. From 1954 through 1957, there was a substantial amount of random dissidence in the countryside, which Diem succeeded in quelling. In early 1957, Vietnam seemed to be enjoying the first peace it had known in over a decade. Beginning, however, in mid-1957 and intensifying through mid-1959, incidents of violence attributed to Viet Cong began to occur in the countryside. While much of this violence appeared to have a political motive, and while there is some evidence to indicate

that it was part of a concerted strategy of guerrilla base development. In accordance with sound Mao-Giap doctrine, the GVN did not construe it as a campaign, considering the disorders too diffuse to warrant committing major GVN resources. In early 1959, however, Diem perceived that he was under serious attack and reacted strongly. Population relocation was revived. The Army of Vietnam was committed against the dissidents, and the Communist Denunciation Campaign was reinvigorated. By autumn 1959, however, the VC were in a position to field units of battalion size against regular army formations. By 1960, VC could operate in sufficient strength to seize provincial capitals for periods ranging up to 24 hours, overrun ARVN posts, and cut off entire districts from communication with the GVN-controlled towns. Diem's counter-measures increasingly met with peasant obstructionism and outright hostility. A U.S. Embassy estimate of the situation in January 1960 noted that:

"While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations . . . these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment . . . the situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment."

In December 1960, the National Liberation Front of SVN (NLF) was formally organized. From its inception it was designed to encompass all anti-GVN activists, including communists, and it formulated and articulated objectives for all those opposed to "My-Diem." The NLF placed heavy emphasis on the withdrawal of American advisors and influence, on land reform and liberalization of the GVN, on coalition government and the neutralization of Vietnam; but through 1963, the NLF soft-pedalled references to reunification of Vietnam. The NLF leadership was a shadowy crew of relatively obscure South Vietnamese. Despite their apparent lack of experience and competence, however, the NLF rapidly took on organizational reality from its central committee, down through a web of subordinate and associated groups, to villages all over South Vietnam. Within a few months of its founding, its membership doubled, doubled again by fall 1961, and then redoubled by early 1962. At that time an estimated 300,000 were on its rolls. Numerous administrative and functional "liberation associations" sprang into being, and each member of the NLF normally belong simultaneously to several such organizations.

The key operational components of the NLF were, however, the Liberation Army and the People's Revolutionary Party. The former had a lien on the services of every NLF member, man, woman, or child, although functionally its missions were usually carried out by formally organized military units. The People's Revolutionary Party was



explicitly the "Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam" and claimed to be the "vanguard of the NLF, the paramount member." It denied official links with the communist party of North Vietnam beyond "fraternal ties of communism." Although the PRP did not come into existence until 1962, it is evident that communists played a paramount role in forming the NLF, and in its rapid initial growth. The official U.S. view has been that the PRP is merely the southern arm of the DRV's communist party, and a principal instrument through which Hanoi instigated and controlled the revolt against "My-Diem." The organizational genius evident in the NLF, as well as the testimony of Vietnamese communists in interrogations and captured documents supports this interpretation.

But significant doubt remains. Viet Minh stay-behinds testified in 1955 and 1956 that their mission was political agitation for the holding of the general elections promised at Geneva. Captured documents and prisoner interrogations indicate that in 1957 and 1958, although there was some "wildcat" activity by local communists, party efforts appeared to be devoted to the careful construction of an underground apparatus which, though it used assassinations and kidnapping, circumspectly avoided military operations. All evidence points to fall of 1959 as the period in which the Viet Cong made their transition from a clandestine political movement to a more overt military operation. Moreover, throughout the years 1954-1960, a "front" seems to have been active in Vietnam. For example, the periodic report submitted by USMAAG, Vietnam, on 15 July 1957 -- a time of ostensible internal peace -- noted that:

"The Viet Cong guerrillas and propagandists, however, are still waging a grim battle for survival. In addition to an accelerated propaganda campaign, the Communists have been forming 'front' organizations to influence portions of anti-government minorities. Some of these organizations are militant, some are political. An example of the former is the 'Vietnamese Peoples' Liberation Movement Forces,' a military unit composed of ex-Cao Dai, ex-Hoa Hao, ex-Binh Xuyen, escaped political prisoners, and Viet Cong cadres. An example of the latter is the 'Vietnam-Cambodian Buddhist Association,' one of several organizations seeking to spread the theory of "Peace and Co-existence."

Whether early references to the "front" were to the organizations which subsequently matured as the NLF cannot be determined. Indeed, to shed further light on the truth or falsehood of the proposition that the DRV did not intervene in South Vietnam until after the NLF came into existence, it is necessary to turn to the events in North Vietnam during the years 1954-1960.

### Hanoi and the Insurgency in South Vietnam (Tab 3)

The primary question concerning Hanoi's role in the origins of the insurgency is not so much whether it played a role or not -- the evidence of direct North Vietnamese participation in subversion against the Government of South Vietnam is now extensive -- but when Hanoi intervened in a systematic way. Most attacks on U.S. policy have been based on the proposition that the DRV move on the South came with manifest reluctance, and after massive U.S. intervention in 1961. For example, George McTurnin Kahin and John W. Lewis, in their book The United States in Vietnam, state that:

"Contrary to United States policy assumptions, all available evidence shows that the revival of the civil war in the South in 1958 was undertaken by Southerners at their own -- not Hanoi's -- initiative. . . . Insurgency activity against the Saigon government began in the South under Southern leadership not as a consequence of any dictate from Hanoi, but contrary to Hanoi's injunctions." \*

As discussed above, so much of this argument as rests on the existence in South Vietnam of genuine rebellion is probably valid. The South Vietnamese had both the means, the Viet Minh residue, and motive to take up arms against Ngo Dinh Diem. Moreover, there were indications that some DRV leaders did attempt to hold back southern rebels on the grounds that "conditions" were not ripe for an uprising. Further, there was apparently division within the Lao Dong Party hierarchy over the question of strategy and tactics in South Vietnam. However, the evidence indicates that the principal strategic debate over this issue took place between 1956 and 1958; all information now available (spring, 1968) points to a decision taken by the DRV leaders not later than spring, 1959, actively to seek the overthrow of Diem. Thereafter, the DRV pressed toward that goal by military force and by subversive aggression, both in Laos and in South Vietnam.

But few Administration critics have had access to the classified information upon which the foregoing judgments are based. Such intelligence as the U.S. has been able to make available to the public bearing on the period 1954-1960 has been sketchy and not very convincing: a few captured documents, and a few prisoner interrogations. Indeed, up until 1961 the Administration itself publicly held that Ngo Dinh Diem was firmly in control in South Vietnam, and that the United States aid programs were succeeding in meeting such threat to GVN security as existed both within South Vietnam and from the North. Too, the vigorous publicizing of "wars of national liberation" by N. S. Khrushchev and the "discovery" of counterinsurgency by the Kennedy Administration in early 1961 tended to reinforce the overall public impression that North Vietnam's aggression was news in that year. Khrushchev's speech of 6 January 1961, made, according to Kennedy biographer Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "a conspicuous

\* The United States in Vietnam, pp. 119-120.



impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff and read excerpts from it aloud to the National Security Council." Thereafter, Administration leaders, by their frequently identifying that Khrushchev declamation as a milestone in the development of communist world strategy, lent credence to the supposition that the Soviet Union had approved aggression by its satellite in North Vietnam only in December 1960 -- the month the NLF was formed.

American Kremlinologists had been preoccupied, since Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, with the possibilities of a genuine detente with the USSR. They were also bemused by the prospect of a deep strategic division with the "Communist Bloc" between the Soviets and the Chinese. Yet, despite evidences of disunity in the Bloc -- in Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, Poland, and East Germany -- virtually all experts regarded North Vietnamese national strategy, to the extent that they considered it at all, as a simple derivative of that of either the USSR or the CPR. P. J. Honey, the British authority on North Vietnam, tends to the view that Hanoi remained subservient to the dictates of Moscow from 1956 through 1961, albeit carefully paying lip service to continue solidarity with Peking. More recently, a differing interpretation has been offered, which holds that the Hanoi leaders were in those years motivated primarily by their concern for internal development, and that they, therefore, turned to the Soviet Union as the only nation willing and able to furnish the wherewithal for rapid economic advancement. Both interpretations assume that through 1960 the DRV followed the Soviet line, accepted "peaceful coexistence," concentrated on internal development, and took action in South Vietnam only after Moscow gave the go-ahead in late 1960.

But it is also possible that the colloquy over strategy among the communist nations in the late 1950's followed a pattern almost exactly the reverse of that usually depicted: that North Vietnam persuaded the Soviets and the Chinese to accept its strategic view, and to support simultaneous drives for economic advancement and forceful reunification. Ho Chi Minh was an old Stalinist, trained in Russia in the early '20's, Comintern colleague of Borodin in Canton, and for three decades leading exponent of the Marxist-Leninist canon on anti-colonial war. Presumably, Ho spoke with authority within the upper echelons of the communist party of the Soviet Union. What he said to them privately was, no doubt, quite similar to what he proclaimed publicly from 1956 onward: the circumstances of North Vietnam were not comparable to those of the Soviet Union, or even those of the CPR, and North Vietnam's policy had to reflect the differences.

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization bombshell burst in February 1956 at a dramatically bad time for the DRV. It overrode the Chinese call for reconvening of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, and it interfered with the concerting of communist policy on what to do about Ngo Dinh Diem's refusal to proceed toward the general elections scheduled for July 1956.

Although the Soviets issued in March 1956 a demand for GVN observance of the Accords, its diplomacy not only failed to bring about any action on behalf of the DRV, but elicited, in April 1956, a sharp British note condemning Hanoi for grave violations of the Accords. Hanoi received the British note about the time that Khrushchev proclaimed that the Soviet was committed to a policy of "peaceful coexistence." At the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, held in Hanoi that month, Ho Chi Minh lauded "de-Stalinization," but unequivocally rejected "peaceful coexistence" as irrelevant to the DRV. In November 1957, after more than a year of upheavals and evident internal political distress in North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan journeyed to Moscow for the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. That conference issued a declaration admitting the possibility of "non-peaceful transition to socialism" remarkably similar in thrust to Ho's 1956 speech. Further, Khrushchev's famous January 1961 speech was simply a precis of the Declaration of the November 1960 Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. That 1960 Declaration, which formed the basis for Khrushchev's pronouncements on wars of national liberation in turn explicitly reaffirmed the 1957 Declaration. The parallelism of the texts is remarkable:

#### HO CHI MINH:

SPEECH CLOSING NINTH PLENUM OF THE  
CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE LAO DONG PARTY  
APRIL 24, 1956

"...We have grasped the great significance of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This Congress has: Analyzed the new situation prevailing in the world, and pointed out the new conditions favorable to the preservation of peace and the advance toward socialism by the Revolutionary Parties of the working class and the laboring people;

Clearly shown the Soviet Union's victorious road, giving us still greater enthusiasm and making us believe still more strongly in the invincible forces of the Soviet Union, the bastion of revolution and of world peace; Pointed out the tasks of the Communist Party in the ideological and organizational fields. The Congress particularly emphasized the application of Marxist-Leninist principles to collective leadership and opposed the cult of the individual.

While recognizing that war may be averted, we must be vigilant to detect the warmongers' schemes; for as long as imperialism exists, the danger of war still exists.

While recognizing that in certain countries the road to socialism may be a peaceful one, we should be aware of this fact: In countries where the machinery of state, the armed forces, and the police of the bourgeois class are still strong, the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle.

While recognizing the possibility of reunifying Viet-Nam by peaceful means, we should always remember that our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are preparing for war; therefore, we should firmly hold aloft the banner of peace and enhance our vigilance..."

#### DECLARATION OF THE CONFERENCE OF COMMUNIST AND WORKERS PARTIES OF SOCIALIST COUNTRIES MOSCOW, 1957

"The communist and workers parties are faced with great historic tasks...In present day conditions in a number of capitalist countries, the working class has the possibility...to unite the majority of the people, when state power without civil war can ensure the transfer of basic means of production to the hands of the people..."

In conditions in which the exploiting classes resort to violence against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility--nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches and history confirms that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the severity and forms of class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism."

#### DECLARATION OF THE CONFERENCE OF COMMUNIST AND WORKERS PARTIES OF SOCIALIST COUNTRIES MOSCOW, 1960

"...The Communist Parties reaffirm the propositions of the 1957 Declaration concerning the question of the forms of transition of various countries from capitalism to socialism.

The Declaration states that the working class and its vanguard-the Marxist-Leninist party--seek to achieve socialist revolution by peaceful means. Realization of this possibility would accord with the interests of the working class and all the people and with the national interests of the country...

...In conditions when the exploiting classes resort to the use of force against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility--that of nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches and historical experience confirms, that the ruling classes do not relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the degree of bitterness and the forms of the class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the extent of the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism.

In each country the actual possibility of one or another means of transition to socialism is determined by the specific historical conditions..."



Other evidence supports the foregoing hypothesis. The DRV was, in 1960, an orthodoxically constituted communist state. Both the government and the society were dominated by the Lao Dong (Communist) Party, and power within the party concentrated in a small elite -- Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants from the old-time Indochinese Communist Party. This group of leaders were unique in the communist world for their homogeneity and for their harmony -- there has been little evidence of the kind of turbulence which has splintered the leadership of most communist parties. While experts have detected disputes within the Lao Dong hierarchy -- 1957 appears to be a critical year in that regard -- the facts are that there has been no blood-purge of the Lao Dong leadership, and except for changes occasioned by apparently natural deaths, the leadership in 1960 was virtually identical to what it had been in 1954 or 1946. This remarkably dedicated and purposeful group of men apparently agreed among themselves as to what the national interests of the DRV required, what goals should be set for the nation, and what strategy they should pursue in attaining them.

These leaders have been explicit in setting forth DRV national goals in their public statements and official documents. For example, Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues placed a premium on "land reform" -- by which they meant a communization of rural society along Maoist lines. Moreover, they clearly considered a disciplined society essential for victory in war and success in peace. It was also evident that they were committed to bring about an independent, reunified Vietnam capable of exerting significant influence throughout Southeast Asia, and particularly over the neighboring states of Laos and Cambodia. What is not known with certainty is how they determined the relative priority among these objectives.

In the immediate aftermath of Geneva, the DRV deferred to the Geneva Accords for the achievement of reunification, and turned inward, concentrating its energies on land reform and rehabilitation of the war-torn economy. By the summer of 1956, this strategy was bankrupt: the Geneva Settlement manifestly would not eventuate in reunification, and the land reform campaign foundered from such serious abuses by Lao Dong cadre that popular disaffection imperiled DRV internal security. In August 1956, the Lao Dong leadership was compelled to "rectify" its programs, to postpone land reform, and to purge low echelon cadre to mollify popular resentment. Even these measures, however, proved insufficient to forestall insurrection; in November 1956, the peasant rebellions broke out, followed by urban unrest. Nonetheless, the DRV leadership survived these internal crises intact, and by 1958 appears to have solved most of the problems of economic efficiency and political organization which occasioned the 1956-1957 outbursts.

But domestic difficulty was not the only crisis to confront the Lao Dong leaders in early 1957. In January, when the Soviet Union proposed

to the United Nations the admitting of North and South Vietnam as separate states, it signalled that the USSR might be prepared in the interests of "peaceful coexistence," to make a great power deal which would have lent permanency to the partition of Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh, in evident surprise, violently dissented. When in February 1957 Khrushchev went further in affirming his intention to "coexist" with the United States, the DRV quickly moved to realign its own and Soviet policies. In May 1957, the Soviet head of state, Voroshilov, visited Hanoi, and in July and August 1957, Ho Chi Minh traveled extensively in Eastern Europe, spending several days in Moscow. The Voroshilov visit was given top billing by the Hanoi Press and Ho, upon his return from Moscow, indicated that important decisions had been reached. Thereafter, Hanoi and Moscow marched more in step.

In the meantime, the needs and desires of communist rebels in South Vietnam had been communicated directly to Hanoi in the person of Le Duan, who is known to have been in South Vietnam in 1955 and 1956, and to have returned to Hanoi sometime before the fall of 1957. In September of that year, upon Ho's return from Europe, Le Duan surfaced as one of the members of the Lao Dong Politburo; it is possible that he was already at that time de facto the First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party, to which position he was formally promoted in September 1960. In 1955 and 1956, Le Duan, from the testimony of prisoners and captured documents, had been expressing conviction that Diem would stamp out the communist movement in South Vietnam unless the DRV were to reinforce the party there. Presumably, he carried these views into the inner councils of the DRV. In November 1957, Le Duan and Ho traveled to Moscow to attend the Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries. The Declaration of that conference, quoted above, has since been cited repeatedly by both North and South Vietnamese communists, as one of the strategic turning points in their modern history. Le Duan, upon his return to Hanoi from Moscow, issued a statement to the effect that the DRV's way was now clear. Taking Le Duan literally, it could be construed that the DRV deemed the Moscow Declaration of 1957 the "go ahead" signal from Moscow and Peking for forceful pursuit of its objectives.

There is some sparse evidence that the DRV actually did begin moving in 1958 to set up a mechanism for supporting the insurgency in South Vietnam. But even had the decision been taken, as suggested above, in late 1957, it is unlikely that there would have been much manifestation of it in 1958. The Lao Dong leadership had for years stressed the lessons that they had learned from experience on the essentiality of carefully preparing a party infrastructure and building guerrilla bases before proceeding with an insurgency. Viet Minh doctrine would have dictated priority concern to refurbishing the communist party apparatus in South Vietnam, and it is possible that such a process was set in motion during 1958. Orders were captured from Hanoi which directed guerrilla bases be prepared in South Vietnam in early 1959.



There is, however, other evidence that questioning among the DRV hierarchy concerning strategy and tactics for South Vietnam continued throughout 1958 and into 1959. Captured reports from party headquarters in South Vietnam betrayed doubt and indecisions among party leaders there and reflected the absence of clear guidance from Hanoi. Moreover, in 1958, and in 1959, the DRV did concentrate much of its resources on agricultural and industrial improvement; extensive loans were obtained from the Soviet Union and from the Chinese Peoples Republic, and ambitious uplift programs were launched in both sectors. It is possible, therefore, to accept the view that through 1958 the DRV still accorded priority to butter over guns, as part of its base development strategy.

In the larger sense, domestic progress, "consolidation of the North," was fundamental to that strategy. As General Vo Nguyen Giap put it in the Lao Dong Party journal Hoc Tap of January 1960:

"The North has become a large rear echelon of our army . . .  
The North is the revolutionary base for the whole country."

Up until 1959, the economy of North Vietnam was scarcely providing subsistence for its people, let alone support for foreign military undertakings; by that year, substantial progress in both agriculture and industry was evident:

	<u>North Vietnam</u>					
	<u>Food Grain per Capita</u>					
	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>
Kilograms	260	310	283	315	358	304
%	100	119	109	121	138	117

Due mainly, however, to industrial growth, the Gross National Product reached a growth rate of 6% per annum in 1958, and sustained that rate thereafter. Both 1958 and 1959 were extraordinarily good years in both industry and agriculture. A long-range development plan launched in 1958 achieved an annual industrial expansion of 21% per year through 1960, chiefly in heavy industry. Foreign aid -- both Chinese and Soviet -- was readily obtained, the USSR supplanting the CPR as prime donor. Foreign trade stepped up markedly. Compared with 1955, the DRV's foreign commerce doubled by 1959, and nearly tripled by 1960.

By 1959, it seems likely that the DRV had elected to pursue a "guns and butter" strategy, and obtained requisite Soviet and Chinese aid. While pressing forward with its economic improvement programs -- which were showing definite progress -- the DRV prepared with word and deed for large-scale intervention in South Vietnam. In May 1959, at the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, a

Resolution was adopted identifying the United States as the main obstacle to the realization of the hopes of the Vietnamese people, and as an enemy of peace. The Resolution of the Fifteenth Plenum called for a strong North Vietnam as a base for helping the South Vietnamese to overthrow Diem and eject the United States. A Communist Party history captured in South Vietnam in 1966, and the testimony of high-ranking captives, indicate that South Vietnamese communists still regard the resolution of the Fifteenth Plenum as the point of departure for DRV intervention.

Within a month of the Fifteenth Plenum, the DRV began to commit its armed forces in Laos, and steadily escalated its aid to the Pathet Lao. By the time the National Liberation Front issued its manifesto in December 1960, the conflict in Laos had matured to the point that Pathet Lao-NVA troops controlled most of NE Laos and the Laotian panhandle; moreover, by that time, the Soviet Union had entered the fray, and was participating in airlift operations from North Vietnam direct to Pathet Lao-NVA units in Laos. Also, by the fall of 1959, the insurgency in South Vietnam took a definite upsurge. Viet Cong units for the first time offered a direct challenge to the Army of Vietnam. Large VC formations seized and held district and province capitals for short periods of time, and assassinations and kidnappings proliferated markedly. The Preamble of the Constitution of the DRV, promulgated on 1 January 1960, was distinctly bellicose, condemning the United States, and establishing the reunification of Vietnam as a DRV national objective. During 1959 and 1960, the relatively undeveloped intelligence apparatus of the U.S. and the GVN confirmed that over 4,000 infiltrators were sent from North Vietnam southward -- most of them military or political cadre, trained to raise and lead insurgent forces.

In September 1960, the Lao Dong Party convened its Third National Congress. There Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, Giap, and others presented speeches further committing the DRV to support of the insurgency in the South, demanding the U.S. stop its aid to Diem, and calling for the formation of a unified front to lead the struggle against "My-Diem." The Resolution of the Third Congress, reflecting these statements, is another of those historic benchmarks referred to in captured party documents and prisoner interrogations.

In November 1960, the Moscow Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries once again declared its support of the sort of "just" war the DRV intended to prosecute. The United States was identified as the principal colonial power, and the right and obligation of communist parties to lead struggles against colonial powers was detailed. By the time Khrushchev cited that Declaration in his "wars of national liberation" speech, the "liberation war" for South Vietnam was nearly a year and a half old.



The evidence supports the conclusion, therefore, that whether or not the rebellion against Diem in South Vietnam proceeded independently of, or even contrary to directions from Hanoi through 1958, Hanoi moved thereafter to capture the revolution. There is little doubt that Hanoi exerted some influence over certain insurgents in the South throughout the years following Geneva, and there is evidence which points to its preparing for active support of large-scale insurgency as early as 1958. Whatever differences in strategy may have existed among Moscow, Peking, and Hanoi, it appears that at each critical juncture Hanoi obtained concurrence in Moscow with an aggressive course of action. Accordingly, it was not "peaceful coexistence," or concern over leadership of the "socialist camp" which governed Hanoi's policy. What appeared to matter to Hanoi was its abiding national interests: domestic consolidation in independence, reunification, and Vietnamese hegemony in Southeast Asia. Both Soviet and Chinese policy seems to have bent to these ends rather than the contrary. If Hanoi applied brakes to eager insurgents in South Vietnam, it did so not from lack of purpose or because of Soviet restraints, but from concern over launching one more premature uprising in the South. Ngo Dinh Diem was entirely correct when he stated that his was a nation at war in early 1959; South Vietnam was at war with both the Viet Cong insurgents and with the DRV, in that the latter then undertook to provide strategic direction and leadership cadres to build systematically a base system in Laos and South Vietnam for subsequent, large-scale guerrilla warfare. Persuasive evidence exists that by 1960 DRV support of the insurgency in South Vietnam included materiel as well as personnel. In any event, by late 1959, it seems clear that Hanoi considered the time ripe to take the military offensive in South Vietnam, and that by 1960 circumstances were propitious for more overt political action. A recently captured high-ranking member of the National Liberation Front has confirmed that in mid-1960 he and other Lao Dong Party leaders in South Vietnam were instructed by Hanoi to begin organizing the National Liberation Front, which was formally founded upon the issuance of its Manifesto on 20 December 1960. \* The rapid growth of the NLF thereafter -- it quadrupled its strength in about one year -- is a further indication that the Hanoi-directed communist party apparatus had been engaged to the fullest in the initial organization and subsequent development of the NLF.

#### U.S. Perceptions of the Insurgency, 1954-1960 (Tab 4)

Much of what the U.S. knows now about the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam rests on information it has acquired since 1963, approximately the span of time that an extensive and effective American intelligence apparatus had been functioning in Vietnam. Before then, our intelligence was drawn from a significantly more narrow and less reliable range of sources, chiefly Vietnamese, and could not have

\* The Washington Post, April 13, 1968, A8.

supported analysis in depth of insurgent organization and intentions. The U.S. was particularly deprived of dependable information concerning events in South Vietnam's countryside in the years 1954 through 1959. Nonetheless, U.S. intelligence estimates through 1960 correctly and consistently estimated that the threat to GVN internal security was greater than the danger from overt invasion. The intelligence estimates provided to policy makers in Washington pegged the Viet Cong military offensive as beginning in late 1959, with preparations noted as early as 1957, and a definite campaign perceived as of early 1959. Throughout the years, they were critical of Diem, consistently expressing skepticism that he could deal successfully with his internal political problems. These same estimates miscalculated the numerical and political strength of the Viet Cong, misjudged the extent of rural disaffection, and over-rated the military capabilities of the GVN. But as strategic intelligence they were remarkably sound.

Indeed, given the generally bleak appraisals of Diem's prospects, they who made U.S. policy could only have done so by assuming a significant measure of risk. For example, on 3 August 1954, an NIE took the position that:

"Although it is possible that the French and Vietnamese, even with firm support from the U.S. and other powers, may be able to establish a strong regime in South Vietnam, we believe that the chances for this development are poor and, moreover, that the situation is more likely to continue to deteriorate progressively over the next year . . ."

This estimate notwithstanding, the U.S. moved promptly to convene the Manila Conference, bring SEATO into being with its protocol aegis over Vietnam, and eliminate France as the recipient of U.S. aid for Vietnam. Again on 26 April 1955, an NIE charged that:

"Even if the present impasse [with the sects] were resolved, we believe that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress towards developing a strong, stable, anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva Agreement and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists . . ."

Within a matter of weeks, however, the U.S. firmly and finally committed itself to unstinting support of Ngo Dinh Diem, accepted his refusal to comply with the political settlement of Geneva, and acceded to withdrawal of French military power and political influence from South Vietnam. Even at the zenith of Diem's success, an NIE of July 1956



noted adverse political trends stemming from Diem's "authoritarian role" and predicted that, while no short-term opposition was in prospect:

"Over a longer period, the accumulation of grievances among various groups and individuals may lead to development of a national opposition movement . . ."

There was no NIE published between 1956 and 1959 on South Vietnam: an NIE of May 1959 took the position that Diem had a serious military problem on his hands:

"The [GVN] internal security forces will not be able to eradicate DRV supported guerrilla or subversive activity in the foreseeable future. Army units will probably have to be diverted to special internal security assignments . . ."

The same NIE noted a waning of popular enthusiasm for Diem, the existence of some disillusionment, "particularly among the educated elite," some "dissatisfaction among military officers," but detected little "identifiable public unrest":

"The growth of dissatisfaction is inhibited by South Vietnam's continuing high standard of living relative to that of its neighbors, the paternalistic attitude of Diem's government towards the people, and the lack of any feasible alternative to the present regime."

The 1959 NIE again expressed serious reservations about Diem's leadership and flatly stated that:

"The prospects for continued political stability in South Vietnam hang heavily upon President Diem and his ability to maintain firm control of the army and police. The regime's efforts to assure internal security and its belief that an authoritarian government is necessary to handle the country's problems will result in a continued repression of potential opposition elements. This policy of repression will inhibit the growth of popularity of the regime and we believe that dissatisfaction will grow, particularly among those who are politically conscious . . ."

Despite these reservations, U.S. policy remained staunchly and fairly uncritically behind Diem through 1959.

The National Intelligence Estimates reservations re Diem do not appear to have restrained the National Security Council in its two major reviews of U.S. policy between 1954 and 1960. In 1956, the NSC (in policy directive NSC 5612) directed that U.S. agencies would:

"Assist Free Vietnam to develop a strong, stable, and constitutional government to enable Free Vietnam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone . . . [and] work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Vietnam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Vietnam under anti-Communist leadership."

In 1958 (in NSC 5809) this policy, with its "roll-back" overtones, was reiterated, although revisions were proposed indicating an awareness of the necessity to adapt the army of Vietnam for anti-guerrilla warfare. Operations Coordinating Board Progress Reports on the implementation of the policies laid out in NSC 5612 and 5809 revealed awareness that Vietnam was under internal attack, and that "in spite of substantial U.S. assistance, economic development, though progressing, is below that which is politically desirable."

While classified policy papers through 1959 thus dealt with risks, public statements of U.S. officials did not refer to the jeopardy. To the contrary, the picture presented the public and Congress by Ambassador Durbrow, General Williams, and other Administration spokesmen was of continuing progress, virtually miraculous improvement, year-in and year-out. Diem was depicted as a strong and capable leader, firmly in command of his own house, leading his people into modern nationhood at a remarkable pace. As late as the summer of 1959, Ambassador Durbrow and General Williams assured the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Vietnam's internal security was in no serious danger, and that Vietnam was in a better position to cope with invasion from the North than it had ever been. In the fall of 1959, in fact, General Williams expressed the opinion that by 1961 GVN defense budgets could be reduced, and in the spring of 1960, he wrote to Senator Mansfield that American military advisors could begin a phased withdrawal from MAAG, Vietnam the following year.

Whatever adverse judgment may be deserved by such statements or by the quality of U.S. assistance to Vietnam on behalf of its internal security, the American aid program cannot be faulted for failing to provide Diem funds in plenty. The U.S. aid program -- economic and military -- for South Vietnam was among the largest in the world. From FY 1946 through FY 1961, Vietnam was the third ranking non-NATO recipient of aid, and the seventh worldwide. In FY 1961, the last program of President Eisenhower's Administration, South Vietnam was the fifth ranking recipient overall. MAAG, Vietnam, was the only military aid mission anywhere in the world commanded by a lieutenant general, and the economic aid mission there was by 1958 the largest anywhere.

Security was the focus of U.S. aid; although military grants comprised only 25% of the total program in the years 1955 through 1961,



more than 75% of the economic aid the U.S. provided in the same period went into the GVN military budget; thus at least \$8 out of every \$10 of aid provided Vietnam went directly toward security. In addition, other amounts of nominally economic aid (e.g., that for public administration) went toward security forces, and aid for agriculture and transportation principally funded projects with strategic purposes and with an explicit military rationale. For example, a 20-mile stretch of highway from Saigon to Bien Hoa, built at General Williams' instance for specifically military purposes, received more U.S. economic aid than all funds provided for labor, community development, social welfare, health, and education in the years 1954-1961.

In March 1960, Washington became aware that despite this impressive outpouring of treasure, material, and advice, the Viet Cong were making significant headway against Diem, and that U.S. aid programs ought to be reconfigured. In March, the JCS initiated action to devise a Counter-insurgency Plan (CIP), intended to coordinate the several U.S. agencies providing assistance to the GVN, and rationalize the GVN's own rural programs. The CIP was worked out among the several U.S. agencies in Washington and Saigon during the summer and fall of 1960.

The heightened awareness of problems in Vietnam did not, however, precipitate changes in NSC policy statements on Vietnam. Objectives set forth in NSC 6012 (25 July 1960) were virtually identical to those of NSC 5809.

Planning proceeded against a background of developing divergence of view between the Departments of State and Defense. As Ambassador Durbrow and his colleagues of State saw the problem on the one hand, Diem's security problems stemmed from his political insolvency. They argued that the main line of U.S. action should take the form of pressures on Diem to reform his government and his party, liberalizing his handling of political dissenters and the rural populace. Department of Defense officials, on the other hand, usually deprecated the significance of non-communist political dissent in South Vietnam, and regarded Diem's difficulties as proceeding from military inadequacy. In this view, what was needed was a more efficient internal defense, and, therefore, the Pentagon tended to oppose U.S. leverage on Diem because it might jeopardize his confidence in the U.S., and his cooperation in improving his military posture. Communist machination, as Defense saw it, had created the crisis; the U.S. response should be "unswerving support" for Diem.

While the CIP was being developed, Department of Defense moved to adapt the U.S. military assistance program to the exigencies of the situation. On 30 March 1960 the JCS took the position that the Army of Vietnam should develop an anti-guerrilla capability within the regular force structure, thus reversing an antithetical position taken by General

Williams. During 1959 Diem had attempted to form a number of special "commando" units from his regular forces, and the MAAG had opposed him on the grounds that these would deplete his conventional strength. In May, MAAG was authorized to place advisers down to battalion level. In June, 1960, additional U.S. Army special forces arrived in Vietnam, and during the summer a number of Ranger battalions, with the express mission of counter-guerrilla operations, were activated. In September, General Williams was replaced by General McGarr who, consistent with the directives of the JCS, promptly began to press the training of RVNAF to produce the "anti-guerrilla guerrilla." General McGarr's desire for an RVNAF capable of meeting and defeating the Viet Cong at their own game was evident in the CIP when it was forwarded to Washington, in January, 1961, just before John F. Kennedy took office.

The CIP had been well coordinated within the U.S. mission in Vietnam, but only partially with the Vietnamese. The plan, as forwarded, incorporated one major point of difference between the Embassy and MAAG. General McGarr desired to increase the RVNAF force level by some 20,000 troops, while Ambassador Durbrow maintained reservations concerning the necessity or the wisdom of additional forces. The Ambassador's position rested on the premise that Diem wanted the force level increase, and that the United States should not provide funds for that purpose until Diem was patently prepared to take those unpalatable political measures the Ambassador had proposed aimed at liberalizing the GVN. The Ambassador held out little hope that either the political or even military portions of the CIP could be successfully accomplished without some such leverage: "Consideration should, therefore, be given to what actions we are prepared to take to encourage, or if necessary to force, acceptance of all essential elements of the plan." In the staff reviews of the CIP in Washington, the divergence between State and Defense noted above came once more to the fore. Those (chiefly within DOD) who considered the VC threat as most important, and who therefore regarded military measures against this threat as most urgent, advocated approval and any other measures which would induce Diem's acceptance of the CIP, and his cooperation with MAAG. They were impatient with Ambassador Durbrow's proposed "pressure tactics" since they saw in them the possibility of GVN delay on vital military matters, and the prospect of little profit other than minor concessions from Diem in political areas they deemed peripheral or trivial in countering the VC. Tipping the scales toward what might be called the Diem/MAAG/DOD priorities was the coincident and increasing need to "reassure" Diem of U.S. support for the GVN and for him personally. The fall of President Syngman Rhee of Korea in April, the abortive November 1960 coup d'etat in Saigon, Ambassador Durbrow's persistent overtures for reform, and above all, uncertainties over U.S. support for the Royal Laotian Government. This requirement to reassure Diem was plainly at cross purposes with the use of pressure tactics.

Ten days after President Kennedy came to office, he authorized a \$41 million increase in aid for Vietnam to underwrite the RVNAF force



level increase and improvements in the Civil Guard -- a complete buy of the CIP. In March, Ambassador Durbrow was replaced by Frederick E. Nolting. Ambassador Durbrow's closing interview with Diem in mid-March was not reassuring. While Diem stated that he was prepared to carry out the military aspects of the CIP, he dodged Durbrow's questions on the political action prescribed. It was on this disquieting note that the Kennedy Administration began its efforts to counter the insurgency in South Vietnam.

IV. A. 5.

Tab 1.

FAILURE OF THE GENEVA SETTLEMENT

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FAILURE OF THE GENEVA SETTLEMENT

A. Introduction: The Flawed Peace

The Geneva Conference of 1954 brought only transitory peace to Indochina. Nonetheless, except for the United States, the major powers were, at the time of the Conference, satisfied that with their handiwork: the truce averted a further U.S. military involvement on the Asian mainland, and dampened a heightening crisis between East and West which might readily have led to conflict outside Southeast Asia. So long as these conditions obtained, neither France, the U.K., the U.S.S.R. nor Communist China were seriously disposed to disturb the modus vivendi in Vietnam. U.S. leaders publicly put the best face possible on the Geneva Settlement -- about all that might possibly have been obtained from a seriously disadvantaged negotiating position, and no serious impairment to freedom of United States action. But the U.S., within its inner councils immediately after Geneva, viewed the Settlement's provisions for Vietnam as "disaster," and determined to prevent, if it could, the further extension of communist government over the Vietnamese people and territory. 1/ U.S. policy adopted in 1954 to this end did not constitute an irrevocable nor "open-ended" commitment to the government of Ngo Dinh Diem. But it did entail a progressively deepening U.S. involvement in the snarl of violence and intrigue within Vietnam, and therefore a direct role in the ultimate breakdown of the Geneva Settlement.

The Settlement of Geneva, though it provided respite from years of political violence, bitterly disappointed Vietnamese of North and South alike who had looked toward a unified and independent Vietnam. For the Viet Minh, the Settlement was a series of disappointing compromises to which they had agreed at the urging of the Soviet Union and China, compromises beyond what hard won military advantage over the French had led them to expect. 2/ For the State of Vietnam in the South, granted independence by France while the Geneva Conference was in progress, the Settlement was an arrangement to which it had not been party, and to which it could not subscribe. 3/ The truce of 1954, in fact, embodied three serious deficiencies as a basis for stable peace among the Vietnamese:

- It relied upon France as its executor.
- It ignored the opposition of the State of Vietnam.
- It countenanced the disassociation of the United States.

These weaknesses turned partitioned Vietnam into two hostile states, and given the absence of a stabilizing international force and the impotence of the ICC, brought about an environment in which war was likely, if not inevitable. . . A nominally temporary "line of demarcation"



between North and South at the 17th parallel was transformed into one of the more forbidding frontiers of the world. A mass displacement of nearly 5% of the population disrupted the polity and heightened tensions in both North and South. And both the Democratic Government of Vietnam (DRV) in the North, and the Government of Vietnam (GVN) in the South armed, with foreign aid, for what each perceived as a coming struggle over reunification. Some of the main roots of the present conflict run to these failures of Geneva.

## B. The Partition of Vietnam

### 1. Provisions for Unifying Vietnam

The sole formal instrument of the Geneva Conference was the document signed by the military commanders of the two hostile forces termed "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet-Nam," dealing largely with the disengagement and regroupment of military forces. 4/ Article 14 of the Agreement contained one brief -- but fateful allusion -- to a future political solution: 5/

"Article 14a. Pending the general elections which will bring about the unification of Vietnam, the conduct of civil administration in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue of the present agreement...."

A more general expression of the intent of the conferees was the unsigned "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference," by which the Conference "takes note" of the aforementioned Agreement and several declarations by represented nations and: 6/

"...recognizes that the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Vietnam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary...declares that, so far as Vietnam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity, and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot. In order to insure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will, general elections shall be held in July, 1956, under the supervision of an international commission composed of representatives of the member States of the International Supervisory Commission, referred to in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities. Consultations

will be held on this subject between the competent representative authorities of the two zones from 20 July 1955 onwards...."

The DRV approved the Final Declaration, and, having failed in its attempts to bring about immediate elections on unification, no doubt did so reluctantly. 7/ There has been some authoritative speculation that the Viet Minh accepted this aspect of the Settlement with deep cynicism; Pham Van Dong, the DRV delegate at Geneva is supposed to have expressed conviction that the elections would never be held. 8/ But it seems more likely that the communist powers fully expected the nascent GVN, already badly shaken from internal stresses, to collapse, and unification to follow with elections or not. In any event, the public stance of the DRV stressed their expectations that the election would be held. Ho Chi Minh stated unequivocally on 22 July 1954 that: "North, Central and South Vietnam are territories of ours. Our country will surely be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated." 9/

The Saigon Government was no less assertive in calling for unification of Vietnam. In a note to the French of 17 July 1954, the GVN delegate at Geneva protested having been left until then "in complete ignorance" of French intentions regarding the division of the country, which he felt failed to "take any account of the unanimous will for national unity of the Vietnamese people"; he proposed, futilely, United Nations trusteeship of all Vietnam in preference to a nation "dismembered and condemned to slavery." 10/ At the final session of the Conference, when called upon to join in the Final Declaration, the GVN delegate announced that his government "reserves its full freedom of action in order to safeguard the sacred right of the Vietnamese people to its territorial unity, national independence and freedom." 11/ Thus the Geneva truce confronted from the outset the anomaly of two sovereign Vietnamese states, each calling for unification, but only one, the DRV, committed to achieving it via the terms of the Settlement.

## 2. France Withdraws, 1954-1956

France, as the third party in Vietnam, then became pivotal to any political settlement, its executor for the West. But France had agreed to full independence for the GVN on June 4, 1954, nearly six weeks before the end of the Geneva Conference. 12/ By the terms of that June agreement, the GVN assumed responsibility for international contracts previously made on its behalf by France; but, there having been no reference to subsequent contracts, it was technically free of the Geneva Agreements. It has been argued to the contrary that the GVN was bound by Geneva because it possessed at the time few of the attributes of full sovereignty, and especially because it was dependent on France for defense. 13/ But such debates turn on tenuous points of international law regarding the prerogatives of newly independent or partitioned states. 14/ It is fact that in the years 1954 to 1956, first the Communist Chinese and then the Soviets acknowledged the separate and sovereign identity of the GVN, and that the United States and



Great Britain did likewise. 15/ It is also fact that France speedily divested itself of responsibilities for "civil administration" in South Vietnam. In February, 1956, the GVN requested France to withdraw its military forces, and on April 26, 1956, the French military command in Vietnam, the signatory of the Geneva Agreement, was dissolved. France, torn by domestic political turbulence in which past disappointments and continued frustrations in Vietnam figured prominently, and tested anew in Algeria, abandoned its position in Southeast Asia. 16/ No doubt, an increasingly acerbic relation between its representatives and those of the United States in South Vietnam hastened its departure, where American policy clashed with French over the arming and training of a national army for the GVN, over French military assistance for the religious sects, over French economic policy on repatriating investments, and over general French opposition to Diem. 17/ But more fundamentally, France felt itself shouldered aside in South Vietnam by the United States over:

(1) Policy toward the DRV. The French averred initially that Ho was a potential Tito, and that they could through an accommodation with him preserve their economic and cultural interests in Vietnam-- in their view, a "co-existence experiment" of world wide significance in the Cold War. 18/ As of December, 1954, they were determined to carry out the Geneva elections. Eventually, however, they were obliged to choose between the U.S. and the DRV, so firmly did the U.S. foreclose any adjustment to the DRV's objectives. 19/

(2) Policy toward Diem. France opposed Diem not solely because he was a vocally Francophobe Annamite, but because he threatened directly their position in Vietnam. His nationalism, his strictures against "feudalists," his notions of moral regeneration all conjoined in an enmity against the French nearly as heated as that he harbored against the communists -- but to greater effect, for it was far easier for him to muster his countrymen's opinion against the French than against the Viet Minh. By the spring of 1955, the Diem-France controversy acquired military dimensions when French supported sect forces took up arms against the GVN. At that time, while the U.S. construed its policy as aiding "Free Vietnam," the French saw Diem as playing Kerensky's role in Vietnam, with the People's Revolutionary Committee as the Bolsheviks, and Ho, the Viet Minh Lenin, waiting off stage. 20/

(3) Military Policy. By the end of 1954, the French were persuaded that SEATO could never offer security for their citizens and other interests in Vietnam, and had despaired of receiving U.S. military aid for a French Expeditionary Corps of sufficient size to meet the threat. 21/ U.S. insistence that it should train RVNAF increased their insecurity. Within the combined U.S.-French headquarters in Saigon thereafter, officers of both nations worked side by side launching countervailing intrigues among the Vietnamese, and among each other. 22/ The relationship became intolerable with French involvement in support of sect forces in open rebellion against U.S. assisted GVN forces.

In March of 1956, as France prepared to accede to the GVN request for withdrawal of its remaining military forces, Foreign Minister Pineau, in a Paris speech, took the U.K. and the U.S. to task for disrupting Western unity. 23/ While Pineau selected U.S. support of French-hating Diem for particular rancor, he did so in the context of decrying France's isolation in dealing with nationalist rebels in North Africa -- and thus generally indicted two powers who had threatened the French empire since the U.K. intervened in Syria in 1941, and President Roosevelt assured the Sultan of Morocco that his sympathies lay with the colonial peoples struggling for independence. 24/

Ultimately, France had to place preservation of its European position ahead of empire, and, hence, cooperation with the U.S. before opposition in Indochina. France's vacating Vietnam in 1956 eased U.S. problems there over the short run, and smoothed Diem's path. But the DRV's hope for a national plebescite were thereby dashed. On January 1, 1955, as the waning of France's power in Vietnam became apparent, Pham Van Dong, DRV Premier, declared that as far as Hanoi was concerned: "... it was with you, the French, that we signed the Geneva Agreements, and it is up to you to see that they are respected." Some thirteen months later the Foreign Minister of France stated that: 25/

"We are not entirely masters of the situation. The Geneva Accords on the one hand and the pressure of our allies on the other creates a very complex juridical situation.... The position in principle is clear: France is the guarantor of the Geneva Accords...But we do not have the means alone of making them respected."

But the GVN remained adamantly opposed to elections, and neither the U.S. nor any other western power was disposed to support France's fulfillment of its responsibility to the DRV.

### 3. Diem Refuses Consultation, 1955

Communist expectations that the Diem government would fall victim to the voracious political forces of South Vietnam were unfulfilled. Diem narrowly escaped such a fate, but with American support -- albeit wavering, and accompanied by advice he often ignored -- Diem within a year of the Geneva Conference succeeded in defeating the most powerful of his antagonists, the armed sects, and in removing from power Francophile elements within his government, including his disloyal military chiefs. He spoke from comparatively firm political ground when, on July 16, 1955, before the date set for consulting with the DRV on the plebescite, he announced in a radio broadcast that: 26/

"We did not sign the Geneva Agreements.

"We are not bound in any way by these Agreements, signed against the will of the Vietnamese people....We shall not miss



any opportunity which would permit the unification of our homeland in freedom, but it is out of the question for us to consider any proposal from the Viet Minh if proof is not given that they put the superior interests of the national community above those of communism."

Moreover, Diem spoke with some assurance of American backing, for the U.S. had never pressed for the elections envisaged by the Settlement. At the final session of Geneva, rather than joining with the Conference delegates in the Final Declaration, the U.S. "observer," Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, had linked U.S. policy vis-a-vis Vietnam to that for Korea, Taiwan and Germany in these terms: 27/

"In the case of nations now divided against their will, we shall continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly."

Although the U.S. opposed elections in 1954 because Ho Chi Minh would have then won them handily, 28/ the records of the National Security Council and the Operations Coordinating Board of the summer of 1954 establishes that this government then nonetheless expected elections eventually to be held in Vietnam. 29/ But, two major misapprehensions were evident: (1) the U.S. planned through "political action" to ameliorate conditions in Southeast Asia to the point that elections would not jeopardize its objective of survival for a "free" vietnam; and (2) the U.S. estimated that France would usefully remain in Vietnam. By the spring of 1955, although U.S. diplomacy had brought the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization into being, and although Diem had with U.S. aid weathered a number of severe political storms, the U.S. was less sanguine that its "political action" would suffice, and that further French presence would be helpful. Accordingly, it began to look closely at the conditions under which elections might be held, and urged that Vietnamese do the same. One definition of terms acceptable to the U.S. was set forth in a State Department memorandum of 5 May 1955, approved by Secretary Dulles: 30/

"The U.S. believes that the conditions for free elections should be those which Sir Anthony Eden put forward and the three Western Powers supported at Berlin in connection with German reunification. The United States believes that the Free Vietnamese should insist that elections be held under conditions of genuine freedom; that safeguards be agreed to assure this freedom before, after, and during elections and that there be adequate guarantees for, among other things, freedom of movement, freedom of presentation of candidates, immunity of candidates, freedom from arbitrary arrest or victimization, freedom of association or political meetings, freedom of expression for all, freedom of the press, radio, and free circulation of newspapers, secrecy of the vote, and security of polling stations and ballot boxes."

Although the U.S. communicated to Diem its conviction that proposing such conditions to the DRV during pre-plebescite consultations would lead promptly to a flat rejection, to Diem's marked advantage in world opinion, Diem found it preferable to refuse outright to talk to the North, and the U.S. indorsed his policy. 31/

#### 4. Divided Vietnam: Status Quo Accepted

The deadline for the consultations in July 1955, and the date set for elections in July 1956, passed without further international action to implement those provisions of the Geneva Settlement. The DRV communicated directly with the GVN in July, 1955, and again in May and June of 1956, proposing not only consultative conference to negotiate "free general elections by secret ballot," but to liberalize North-South relations in general. 32/ Each time the GVN replied with disdain, or with silence. The 17th parallel, with its demilitarized zone on either side, became de facto an international boundary, and -- since Ngo Dinh Diem's rigid refusal to traffic with the North excluded all economic exchanges and even an interstate postal agreement -- one of the most restricted boundaries in the world. The DRV appealed to the U.K. and the U.S.S.R. as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference to no avail. 33/ In January, 1956, Communist China requested another Geneva Conference to deal with the situation, but the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. responded only by extending the functions of the International Control Commission beyond its 1956 expiration date. 34/ By early 1957 the partition of Vietnam was generally accepted throughout the international community. In January, 1957, the Soviet Union proposed the admission of both the GVN and the DRV to the United Nations, the U.S.S.R. delegate declaring that "in Vietnam two separate States existed, which differed from one another in political and economic structure...." 35/

Professor Hans Morganthau, writing at the time, and following a visit to South Vietnam, described the political progress of the GVN as a "miracle," but stated that conditions for free elections obtained in neither the North nor the South. 36/ He concluded that:

"Actually, the provision for free elections which would solve ultimately the problem of Vietnam was a device to hide the incompatibility of the Communist and Western positions, neither of which can admit the domination of all of Vietnam by the other side. It was a device to disguise the fact that the line of military demarcation was bound to be a line of political division as well...."

#### 5. The Discontented

However, there were three governments, at least, for which the status quo of a Vietnam divided between communist and non-communist governments was unacceptable. The GVN, while remaining cool to the DRV, pursued an active propaganda campaign prophesying the overturning of communism in the North, and proclaiming its resolve ultimately to reunify the nation in freedom. The United States supported the GVN, having



established as national policy in 1956, reaffirmed again in 1958, these guidelines: 37/

"Assist Free Viet Nam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government to enable Free Viet Nam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone....Work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Viet Nam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Viet Nam under anti-Communist leadership.... Support the position of the Government of Free Viet Nam that all Viet Nam elections may take place only after it is satisfied that genuinely free elections can be held throughout both zones of Viet Nam....Treat the Viet Minh as not constituting a legitimate government, and discourage other non-Communist states from developing or maintaining relations with the Viet Minh regime...."

And the Democratic Republic of Vietnam became increasingly vocal in its calls for "struggle" to end partition. In April, 1956, as the plebescite deadline neared, Ho Chi Minh declared ominously that: 38/

"While recognizing that in certain countries the road to socialism may be a peaceful one, we should be aware of this fact: In countries where the machinery of state, the armed forces, and the police of the bourgeois class are still strong, the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle.

"While recognizing the possibility of reunifying Vietnam by peaceful means, we should always remember that our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are preparing for war...."

In 1956, however, Ho Chi Minh and the DRV faced mounting internal difficulties, and were not yet in a position to translate the partition of Vietnam into casus belli.

### C. Refugees: Disruption of Vietnam's Society

#### 1. Provisions for Regroupment

Article 14 of the "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam," which provided for separate political administrations north and south of the 17th parallel, also stated that: 39/

"14(d) From the date of entry into force of the present agreement until the movement of troops is completed, any civilians residing in a district controlled by one

party who wish to go and live in the zone assigned to the other party shall be permitted and helped to do so by the authorities in that district."

It is probable that none of the conferees foresaw the ramifications of that one sentence, for it put in motion one million Vietnamese refugees, most of them destitute, who became at first heavy burdens on the DRV and the GVN, and ultimately political and military assets for both regimes. For the United States, the plight of these peoples lent humanitarian dimensions to its policy toward Vietnam, and new perspectives to its economic and military assistance.

## 2. Exodus to South Vietnam

In accordance with Article 1 of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, 190,000 troops of the French Expeditionary Corps were moved from North Vietnam to the South. In addition, some 900,000 civilians exercised their option under Article 14 (d) of the Armistice. While no wholly reliable statistics exist, there is agreement among several authorities that the figures presented by the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam (ICC), citing chiefly the Saigon Government as its source, are generally correct: 40/

### Figures of Movement of Population in Vietnam Under Article 14 (d)

<u>North Zone to South Zone</u>		<u>Period Ending</u>	
(i)	Total arrivals (Figs. given by the State of Vietnam)	19.5.55	By air 213,635 By sea 550,824 Across provisional demarcation line 12,344 By other means <u>41,324</u>
			Total 818,127
(ii)	Estimate of arrivals not registered (Figs. given by the State of Vietnam in April)		<u>70,000</u>
			Total 888,127
(iii)	Figs. given by PAVN	19.5.55 20.7.55	4,749
		Up to 20.7.55 -----	TOTAL <u>892,876</u>

The uncertainty of statistics concerning total numbers of refugees stems not only from DRV reluctance to report departures, but also the turbulent conditions which then obtained throughout Vietnam, where the French were in the process of turning over public administration



to Vietnamese, and where Saigon's communications with refugee relief operations in the field were at best tenuous. U.S. Department of State analysis in 1957 estimated the following composition and disposition of the refugees:

Civilian Regroupees from the North, 1954-1955 41/

<u>Category</u>	<u>Number (Approximate)</u>
1. Registered with GVN for refugee benefits	640,000 Vietnamese 15,000 Nungs 5,000 Chinese
2. French citizens resettled or repatriated by France	40,000
3. Chinese absorbed into Chinese community in South	<u>45,000</u>
Total	745,000
	(Remainder, 200,000 Vietnamese absorbed without aid, <u>e.g.</u> , dependents of military, civil servants.)

The GVN director of refugee programs reported that the refugees were composed, by trade, as follows: 42/

Farmers-----76%  
Fishermen-----10%  
Artisans, small business-  
men, students, govern-  
ment employees,  
professionals-----14%

But it was religious orientation which ultimately assumed the greatest importance in South Vietnam's political life: an estimated 65% of North Vietnam's Catholics moved to the South, more than 600,000 in all; these, with 2,000 northern Protestants, were settled in their own communities. 43/

3. Causes of the Exodus

The flight from North Vietnam reflected apprehension over the coming to power of the Viet Minh. Institutionally, the Viet Minh were further advanced in North Vietnam than the South, and had in areas of the North under their control already conducted several experiments in social revolution.

In 1951, with the legalization of the Communist Party, an "economic leveling" program was launched, consisting of punitive taxes levied on the wealthy. 44/ In 1953, there was a short but sharp terror campaign, followed by a "Land Rent Reduction," which formed poor peasants into "land reform battalions" to administer "people's justice" to landlords and their families. These were only preliminaries, however, to the DRV's "Land Reform Campaign" of 1954 to 1956, which more systematically and terroristically struck at traditional wealth distribution. All of these undertakings were associated with the Viet Minh, and though mitigated by the victory over the French and the benign image of "Uncle Ho," they aroused rural resentment and fears.

But the flood of refugees also sprang from other sources. There were a few French, and 200,000 Vietnamese who had been French civil servants, or dependents of French soldiers, or retainers -- these had every reason to anticipate hostility. There were the Nung tribal people, who had been allied with the French during the war, and would probably have clashed with the North Vietnamese government whatever its policies. The Chinese shadow over the Viet Minh deepened Nung fears, and strengthened tendencies within the Chinese community of Hanoi to split along Nationalist/Communist lines after the fashion of overseas Chinese throughout the Far East; many Chinese fled. Rich or landed Vietnamese could, with reason, be apprehensive over DRV policies toward the wealthy, and be drawn to the presumably more open South. A former ICC member has noted that there was a labor market in the South, and rumors of an impending corvee labor program in the labor surplus North -- both incentives to migrate. Viet Minh propaganda painted grim pictures of life in South Vietnam, and savagely attacked the French and Americans who were aiding refugees. In turn, French and American propaganda promoted recourse to migration to escape the terrors and injustice of communism. Voice of America was active in rebutting the Viet Minh radio, and battery radios were reportedly distributed to extend the audience for Western programs. Colonel Lansdale described a U.S. instigated black propaganda campaign of pamphlets and announcements, ostensibly Viet Minh in origin, aimed at discrediting the DRV, depreciating its currency, and adding to popular fears of its new powers. One outcome was rampant rumor. For example, the ICC source cited above reported that some refugees believed that the U.S. would use atomic bombs on the Viet Minh. Dr. Tom Dooley found refugees with a Viet Minh pamphlet showing a Hanoi map with three concentric circles of nuclear destruction -- conceivably, an example of Colonel Lansdale's handiwork. 45/

Again, however the salient political aspect of the migration was that most of the refugees -- two out of three -- were Catholics. Many northern Catholics, with a long history of persecution at the hands of non-Catholic Tonkinese, would probably have left with their French protectors whatever the character of the successor. But Catholic opposition to the Viet Minh during the war invited retribution, and Ngo Dinh Diem's ascendancy in Saigon was no doubt attractive to his northern co-religionists.



Moreover, almost as soon as the truce became effective, the Catholic bishops entered into a test of power with the Viet Minh, using their "self-defense forces" to balk DRV occupation. The response was predictably ruthless: Catholic villages were attacked by PAVN troops, and in two instances, inhabitants reportedly were massacred; churches were burned, Church property confiscated, priests tortured or jailed, and heavy taxes levied on Church lands and buildings. Among the consequences of that violence was a Catholic propaganda campaign against the Viet Minh -- e.g., the-Virgin-had-gone-South theme -- and mass migrations of whole parishes. 46/

#### 4. Exodus: Test of Geneva

The movement of refugees from North Vietnam quickly became a central point of international controversy. Both parties to the Geneva Agreement accused the other of violations in impeding the free egress of would-be migrants, and both sides were undoubtedly at least partially justified in their charges. Aside from the propaganda campaign, France -- with substantial American aid -- helped refugees with food, medicine, and transportation. American and French ships moved whole villages southward, and American and French charities provided for their well-being during the journey and after their arrival in their new homeland. The U.S. Government, besides assigning a Task Force of the Seventh Fleet to refugee assistance, furnished the Saigon Government with \$56,000,000 in 1955, and \$37,000,000 in 1956 for refugee relief and resettlement considering the outflow from North Vietnam "a convincing tribute to the Free World and an indictment of the Communists." At the same time, both the GVN and the U.S. actively discouraged migration from the South -- the GVN mainly by administrative obfuscation, the U.S. primarily through another propaganda campaign, targeted against Viet Minh in South Vietnam. 47/

DRV behavior toward refugees during the year in which "regroupment" was authorized has served then and since as an indictment of its character, and proof that it could not be expected to permit free elections. Leo Cherne of Look, and Dr. Tom Dooley dramatized the misery and fearfulness of the refugees for American audiences. 48/ Ngo Dinh Diem utilized refugees systematically to mobilize opinion in South Vietnam against Geneva, the ICC, and the DRV as well. 49/ Since the issue has become central to the American policy debate on Vietnam, Frank N. Trager, for example, has stated that, after the DRV perceived that the numbers moving south by far exceeded those coming north, the DRV was impelled to: 50/

"...impose restrictions and brutal punishments on those who sought to go South. Summary arrests, denial of permits, intimidation by 'show trials' of those who served as leaders of the exodus, and executions served to inhibit the exercise of the option. Residual petitions affecting 95,000 persons in the North were presented to the International Control Commission. Nothing ever came of these. An unknown number were thus never allowed to

leave the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The refugee problem was one of the most far reaching issues at the time...."

This condemnation of the DRV was fairly well substantiated by U.S. intelligence. A U.S. Intelligence Advisory Committee report of 1955 quotes "usually reliable French intelligence reports" that after October 1954 three DRV regular infantry divisions, with local forces, were positioned to block refugee movement. These, with "voluminous reports from Catholic and other sources" indicated that the DRV, with armed forces, by barring refugees from local transport, and through economic penalties, was pursuing a deliberate policy to prevent departures. Article 14(d) of the Geneva Agreement obliged the DRV to assist the movement of would-be refugees, but GVN officials reported receiving only 15,000 refugees bearing official Viet Minh exit permits, including 8,300 who obtained their papers under direct ICC supervision. U.S. and French naval officers have attested that thousands of northerners literally escaped to their waiting ships. 51/

Again, no entirely dependable record exists. The ICC was impeded in its observations and reporting by "narrow and complicated administrative procedures in the areas in the control of the PAVN...." 52/ Of 119 investigations conducted by ICC mobile teams during the period, 34 dealt with violations of Article 14(d) alleged by first parties. Beyond these, however, DRV authorities submitted to the ICC 320,000 petitions from friends and relations of regroupes alleging that the French had forced evacuation, and "thousands" of petitions were received from French sources claiming that the DRV was obstructing those who wished to move South. 53/ After a survey of 25,000 refugees in the South, the ICC teams reported that "there was no foundation for the allegation that thousands were victims of a systematic propaganda and many of them wished to go back to the PAVN zone and none of the persons contacted by the teams complained of forced evacuation or expressed a desire to return...." 54/ Investigations in the North, however, did disclose that observance of Article 14(d) by the DRV was not uniformly satisfactory. The ICC majority report notes that: 55/

"(ii) religious, social and local influences were used by both sides either to persuade persons to change their zone of residence or to dissuade them from exercising the freedom of choice regarding the zone in which they wanted to live.

"(iii) the demand for permits and facilities under Article 14(d) was the largest in the areas under the control of the PAVN and it was generally met except in the areas of Nghe An and Ha Tinh...."

The named areas were predominantly Catholic, and in the village of Iau My, in the province of Nghe An, the ICC team did report on a clash between the civil populace and troops of the DRV in which at least



12 villagers were killed; in another locality, Ba Lang, other incidents of violence were reported which led to 200 arrests. 56/ It was the view of the Indian and Polish members of the ICC, however, that despite these incidents "by the 18th of May (1955) the bulk of the persons who wanted to change the zone of their residence had succeeded in doing so." The Canadian member dissented and submitted a minority report detailing other examples of forceful obstruction of refugees by DRV authorities or crowds, and concluded these were "deliberately planned." Moreover, the Canadians were convinced that the DRV had so effectively restricted ICC inspections that: "it's still not possible to say whether all persons wishing to move from one zone to the other have been able to do so." 57/ Estimates of the numbers of persons prevented from migrating from North Vietnam range from Asian scholar Ellen Hammer's "several fold" those who left, and Diem's estimate of twice the number who reached the South, to Robert Shaplen's "no more than 400,000," and B.S.N. Murti of the ICC, who thinks a number approaching 2,000 likely. 58/

#### 5. Impact of the Exodus: North

Whatever the DRV's intentions concerning the exodus, the numbers of refugees who were permitted to depart speaks for itself: if the estimate of 900,000 is correct, the DRV witnessed the flight of 1 out of every 13 of its citizens at a time when, ostensibly, votes and labor were important to its future. It should be noted that the DRV capitalized upon the abandoned land and other property of the refugees in its initial wealth redistribution schemes, and thus had motive to encourage, rather than impede, departures. 59/ The timing of the uproar with the ICC over violations of Article 14(d) suggests an answer: the incidents observed by the ICC in the North, as well as manifestations in the South of discontent with Saigon's observance of the agreement, multiplied after October, 1954, and peaked toward May, 1955, indicating that the DRV pursued a progressively more ruthless policy on departures. 60/ In seeking to attenuate the outflow, the DRV undoubtedly resorted to stringent measures, at least in certain localities. Whether these measures approached the depravities depicted by Trager and others cannot be adjudicated with present evidence, but it is clear that refugees provided an early and severe test of the DRV's capability for humane and democratic action consistent with the Geneva Settlement -- and in the eyes of many observers in South Vietnam and the West, the DRV failed abjectly, seriously damaging its position vis-a-vis the plebescite. 61/ Within North Vietnam, the refugee experience developed deep divisions between the DRV and rural Catholics which were to persist more than a year after the Geneva movement arrangement expired.

#### 6. Impact of the Exodus: South

For the GVN, the influx of 900,000 people presented problems of paralyzing proportions. Within a few months of Ngo Dinh Diem's taking office, Saigon was ringed with shabby encampments whose inhabitants were wholly dependent on the already overburdened government. Had

it not been for U.S. aid, many of the refugees might never have reached the South, and without U.S. aid there, many might have perished. The U.S. Navy moved 310,848 persons in its "Operation Exodus." The \$93 million the GVN received from the U.S. comprised 97% of the funds it dispensed for these purposes, nearly \$100 per refugee in a country with a lower national income per capita. 62/ This official aid, plus substantial assistance from American charities, combined with a remarkably energetic and imaginative Vietnamese administration, succeeded by 1957 in providing decent habitation and livelihood for all but a few of the refugees -- a genuinely laudable accomplishment, which must stand with the defeat of the sects among Diem's crowning achievements. 63/

Because of the GVN's undertakings for the refugees, the Geneva "regroupment" turned out, at least initially, very much to its advantage: it gained nearly 1 million loyal citizens adamantly opposed to reunification were it to mean their return to DRV rule, whose recounted experiences with the Viet Minh buttressed the moral fiber of the South. Here were whole communities largely dependent on the GVN, untouched by the armed religious sects, and hostile to the Viet Minh, from which Diem could recruit reliable political and military cadres. Here were masses disposed to follow Diem uncritically, easily manipulated for political purposes by Diem or his family. Here, for aid-dispensing Americans, were Vietnamese whose needs were basic, and who proved capable of absorbing simple, quick-return, highly visible forms of assistance.

The GVN began to politicize the refugee communities almost immediately. For example, in July, 1955, when the DRV appealed to Diem to commence consultation towards the plebescite, an apparently well-directed mob of refugees attacked the hotel quarters of the ICC. 64/ Some 20,000 of the refugees were moved together to a sparsely settled tract in the Mekong Delta of 100,000 acres, which was cleared, plowed and irrigated with substantial American technical assistance and 100 tractors; this, the Cai San project, became a showcase of American aid for visitors. 65/ In a much smaller, yet perhaps more significant instance, the GVN formed small, black-pajamaed "civic action" cadres for the purpose of building communications between Saigon and the villages; although the original idea had been to use Saigon bureaucrats, these failed to volunteer, and the bulk of the teams were eventually manned by northern refugees. 66/ Later, refugee communities were transplanted to the frontiers to enhance both the local economy and security there. 67/ The GVN was not ungrateful, and eventually the preferred positions in the Army and the bureaucracy began to be filled with refugee Catholics and other northerners.

In the long run, however, Diem squandered the advantage the Geneva regroupment brought him. His policies kept the refugees an unasimilated, special interest group, which produced further distortions in an already stressed polity. They in turn projected in rural areas an unfavorable image of the GVN, which probably figured in its eventual rejection by most Cochinchinese and non-Catholic Annamites: a government



whose protection and largess were extended preferentially to Catholics and northerners. 68/

#### 7. Southerners Regrouped North

Whether or not at the time of Geneva the DRV leaders genuinely expected the plebescite of 1956, the Viet Minh of Annam and Cochinchina were apparently instructed through their Communist Party cadre that elections would be held. Thousands of Vietnamese left the South under the regroupment provisions of the Settlement. Upon cadre assurances of return, they staked family ties, ancestral lands, and fortunes.

Unfortunately, we know little still about the Southern regrouppees in the North, and less about the Viet Minh who stayed behind when their comrades departed. The reports of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in Vietnam record the movement of only 4,269 civilians from the South to north of the 17th parallel. 69/ After April 1955, as reported by the ICC, refugees applied to the Saigon authorities, in such numbers that the GVN proved unable to meet demands for permits or transportation. Demonstrations occurred, and special arrangements by the ICC and the French were necessitated. Nonetheless, the total number thus formally involved in ICC reported moves was less than 5,000. 70/ The very sizable migration in 1954 of Viet Minh from the French controlled zone aboard Polish and Soviet ships to the North has not been reported authoritatively. An estimated 90,000 armed Viet Minh departed. An Indian member of the ICC published in 1964 the following figures, which correspond with the totals furnished by the French and the Poles, and which appear on present evidence to be as reliable as any: 71/

#### Viet Minh Departures for DRV 1954-1955

<u>Assembly Area</u>		<u>Category</u>		<u>Materiel</u>
Quang Nai-Binh Dinh	64,000	Warriors	87,000	Luggage
Ham Tan-Xuyen Moc	16,000			244 vehicles
Plaine des Joncs	20,000	Admin Cadres,		1 tank
Cau Mau	30,000	Liberated		28 artillery pieces
		POW, and		3384 tons supplies
		families	<u>43,000</u>	
Total:	130,000	Total:	130,000	

Among the total, there were a significant number of Montagnards -- Bernard Fall states 10,000 -- and children. A Viet Cong lieutenant colonel, captured in 1961, then one of the senior officers of the Viet Cong intelligence services, has confirmed that Highlanders and 10,000 children were among the regrouppees, and that DRV was taking pains to educate both groups well.

Concerning numbers of Viet Minh left behind, figures are even more vague. U.S. intelligence as of 1956 accepted 8,000 as its best estimate, of which 5,000 were armed and organized in skeletal military units; there were reports of strengths up to 10,000. 72/ A more recent U.S. intelligence appraisal states that: 73/

"While the number of hard-core Communists remaining in South Vietnam after 1954 cannot be confirmed, French and South Vietnamese estimates, based on observations of friendly military commanders in the field, placed the figure at 5,000 'armed Viet Minh.' However, this is clearly a conservative estimate since it does not include political agents or 'soft core' members or supporters...."

In summary, best current estimates indicate:

Disposition of Viet Minh in South 1954-55

Moved North

By Polish and Soviet Ships	90,000 Armed Viet Minh <u>40,000 Dependents</u>
	130,000 Including: 10,000 Highlanders 10,000 Children
By other transport	<u>4,269</u>
	134,269 TOTAL

Left Behind

5,000 Armed Viet Minh  
3,000 Political Cadre  
Unknown dependents of Viet Minh

8. Viet Minh Motivations

Interviews with captured or defected regroupes, and captured Viet Cong documents, establish that the DRV leadership told the Viet Minh in 1954 that the general elections and unification mentioned in Article 14 of the Geneva Agreement would occur in July 1956, as asserted in the Final Declaration of the Conference. 74/ Accordingly, unlike the refugees fleeing south, who evidently accepted permanent separation from their birthplace, most of the Viet Minh who were regrouped to the North expected to be separated from their homes and families only two years. There were a variety of motives or emotions involved, but whatever response the cadre evoked in their



followers, it was clearly understood by all rank and file that the regroupment instructions were an order, and most responded as did one POW: "I did my duty as a soldier." Some were told to go; some to marry, then go; some to stay. After the initial regroupment in 1954, no further large-scale movement northward was encouraged by the DRV. The outburst of enthusiasm for regroupment which resulted in demonstrations in Saigon in April 1955, and DRV support for same, can be attributed to growing conviction that Diem might succeed in his drive for political control, and that he or the U.S. would not permit general elections, or to a tactical cover for the DRV's own difficulties with clamoring would-be refugees. 75/

As of March 1967, a report was available on 23 Viet Minh who stayed behind in 1954. These men had been systematically interviewed, and while they comprise a slender sample, their replies give no evidence that violence or sabotage were included in the initial orders of any; rather, they received organizational and propaganda missions: 76/

"POW: We were given training about the Geneva treaty. We were instructed to work normally with the peasants, to earn a living and to explain to them the clauses of the treaty. We pointed out that general elections would be held in 1956."

Another distributed leaflets, hung posters and organized meetings to promote the plebiscite. One had orders "to work as a core cadre exhorting the population to demand negotiations with North Vietnam for a general election." Still another distributed petitions demanding elections, trade relations with DRV, and peace.

However, this "political action" never promised much, since the GVN never seemed disposed toward holding the elections. When in July 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem dismissed with finality any prospect for consultations, the lines began to be drawn between the "stay-behind" cadre and the Saigon government. 77/ After 1956, the last illusions were dispelled, and the Viet Minh apparatus went wholly underground. 78/

#### D. Arming of the North and the South

##### 1. Provisions for Arms Control

The Geneva Conference intended to fix a ceiling on foreign military personnel, bases and arms in Vietnam corresponding to the levels of July 1954. Within months of the Conference, the DRV and the GVN were each led to believe that the other was contravening those arms control provisions of the Settlement. The DRV could claim, with justification, that the United States was introducing new arms and personnel, assuming an amplified military role in Vietnam, and acquiring bases. The GVN could accuse the DRV, again with justification, of building

a massive army, and modernizing it with Communist bloc aid. 79/ The ICC, discredited in its attempts to cope with observance of Article 14(d) of the "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities..." regarding refugees, was further devalued as a stabilizing influence when forced to admit that it was impotent in inspecting compliance with Articles 16, 17, 18, and 19: 80/

"Article 16...the introduction into Viet-Nam of any troop reinforcements and additional military personnel is prohibited....

"Article 17...the introduction into Viet-Nam of any reinforcement in the form of all types of arms, munitions, and other war material, such as combat aircraft, naval craft, pieces of ordnance, jet engines and armoured vehicles, is prohibited....

"Article 18...the establishment of new military bases is prohibited throughout Viet-Nam territory.

"Article 19...no military base under the control of a foreign State may be established in the regrouping zone of either party; the two parties shall ensure that the zones assigned to them do not adhere to any military alliance and are not used for the resumption of hostilities or to further an aggressive policy."

In June, 1958, the ICC issued the following statement concerning its inability to enforce the provisions of Articles 16 and 17: 81/

"The persistence of the Parties in not accepting the Commission's interpretation of the provisions of the Agreements and their failure to implement the recommendations made to them by the Commission have rendered it difficult for the Commission to supervise the implementation of the Articles concerned. The Commission will, as hitherto, continue to discharge its duties under the Geneva Agreements, but would like to emphasize that the lack of cooperation from the Parties seriously affects the effectiveness of its supervision and control. The Commission can, therefore, discharge its responsibilities only to the extent permitted by the Parties, and not as decided by the Commission in accordance with the Geneva Agreements. The Commission hopes that in the future a larger measure of cooperation will be forthcoming from the Parties and the difficulties which have persisted so far will cease to hinder its activities."

The test of the Geneva Agreement also allowed for the rotation of personnel, and the replacement of "destroyed, damaged, worn out or used up" material, arms, and munitions, provided that advance notice



of movements be furnished the ICC, and specified points of entry and departure be employed. Neither the DRV nor the GVN cooperated with the ICC in all respects. The U.S., though it took steps to maintain the appearances of compliance through 1960, especially on personnel ceilings, and although it considered itself hampered by the Settlement, was able to provide in that time over \$50,000,000 per annum worth of military assistance to the GVN. 82/ The failure of the Geneva Settlement to control the arming of Vietnam, with its concomitant heightened fears and potential for violence, no less than in the case of the plebescite and the refugees, was directly antecedent to the insurgency in South Vietnam.

## 2. PAVN Modernizes

At the close of hostilities, the Viet Minh probably had some 300,000 to 400,000 men under arms -- about 130,000 regulars -- of which all but about 70,000 were concentrated in North Vietnam and Laos. (See Map, ff.) 83/ The French had fielded 420,000 troops, including about 200,000 Vietnamese. Both sides received extensive aid from non-combatants, the French chiefly from the U.S., and the DRV chiefly from China. One recent estimate puts relative volumes of aid as follows: 84/

### COMPARISON OF TONNAGE OF U.S. AID TO FRANCE WITH CHINESE COMMUNIST AID TO VIET MINH

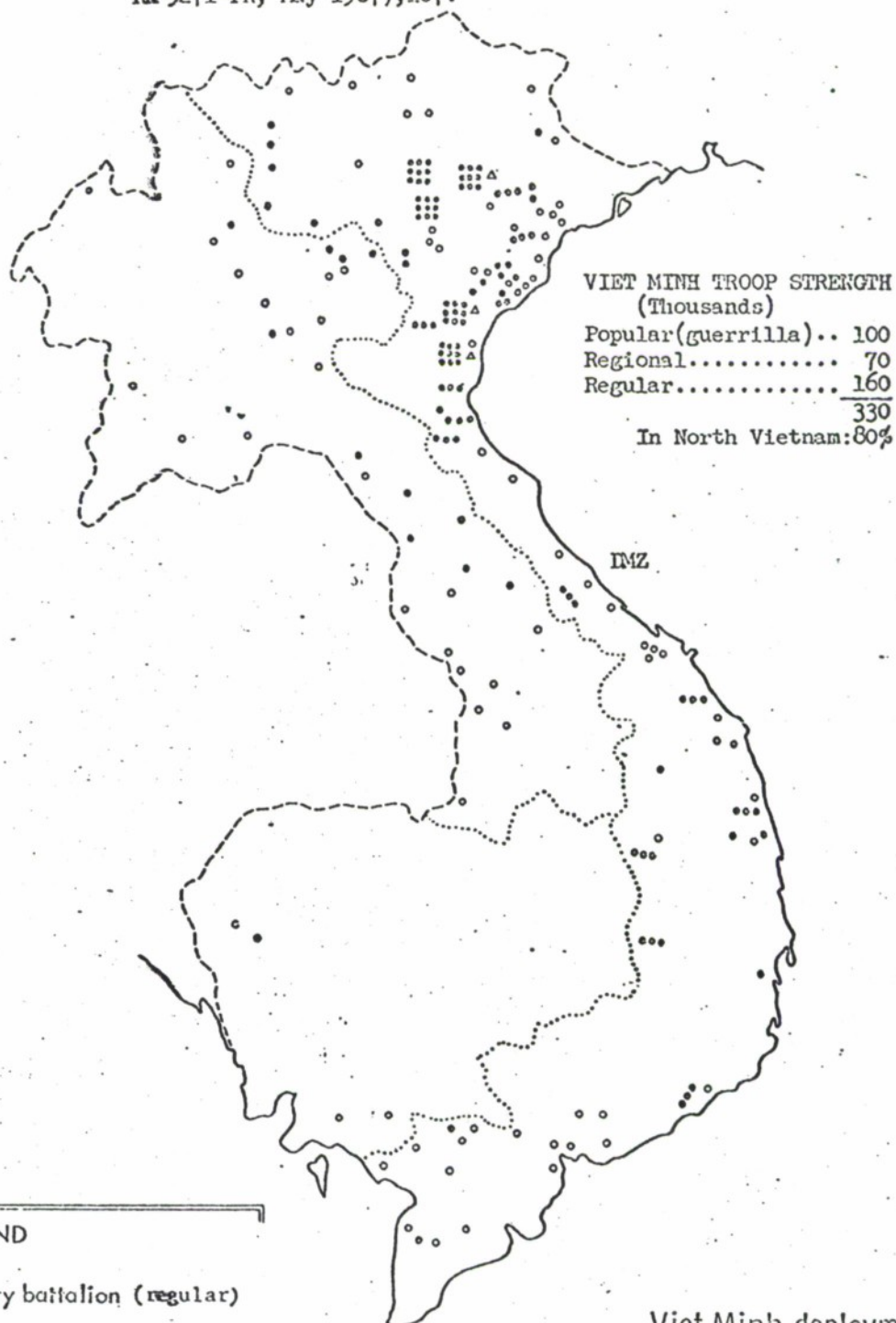
	<u>U.S. Aid</u>	<u>Chinese Aid</u>
1951	7,200 tons/month	10 to 20 tons/month
1953	10,000 tons/month	500 to 600 tons/month
1954	n.a.	4,000 tons/month (as of Dien Bien Phu)

The differences between the two aid programs were, of course, significant beyond tonnages. The Chinese aid was largely infantry arms and ammunition, while U.S. shipments ranged across the whole costly and complicated inventory of the U.S. armed forces. More importantly, in contrast with the highly visible U.S. participation, Chinese aid was clandestine; neither the donor nor the recipient has owned to the aid program to this date, and in maintaining the flow without attribution the DRV developed procedures which stood it in good stead after Geneva.

The DRV, from all U.S. intelligence has been able to discern, commenced the reorganization and refitting of its Peoples' Army of Vietnam (PAVN) concurrently with occupation of Tonkin behind the withdrawing French. U.S. evidence indicated that shipments of military materiel from China and the Soviet significantly exceeded in kind and

Source: V.J. Croizat, trans., A Translation from the French:  
Lessons of the War in Indochina (Santa Monica: RAND Corp.,  
 RA-5271-FR, May 1967), 107.

62



# LEGEND

Infantry battalion (regular)

○ Regional battalion

△ Artillery or anti-aircraft or engineer battalion

21

Viet Minh deployment  
September 30, 1953



amount that required for replacement, and that, rather, the DRV steadily modernized and expanded its forces during the decade after Geneva. 85/ In the first six months after the truce alone, U.S. intelligence reported that PAVN introduced from China, concealing the movements from the ICC, more than 150 pieces of field and anti-aircraft artillery, 500 mortars, 9,000 automatic weapons, 500 recoilless rifles, 400 military vehicles, and substantial amounts of ammunition. 86/ Thereafter, the U.S. was convinced that regular infusions of modern equipment from the CPR and the Soviet Union supported extensive reorganization and growth of DRV armed forces.

Trends in DRV Armed Strength 87/  
(in thousands)

	<u>PAVN</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>AF</u>	<u>Provincial Forces</u>	<u>Armed Public Security Force</u>	<u>Armed Militia</u>	<u>Total</u>
1954	144	N.A.	N.A.	77	N.A.	N.A.	221
1955	173	N.A.	N.A.	72	N.A.	75	320
1959	270	1.6	0.3	35.5	15	100	422
1963	240	2.5	0.5	--	15	200	458

According to U.S. estimates, the period 1954-1956 was devoted to regrouping and reorganizing. New divisions were formed, incorporating Viet Minh from South Vietnam regrouped to the North per the Geneva Agreements. Overage and unfit personnel were weeded out, and intensive political indoctrination begun. Divisions were deployed into the countryside, with the new southern formations concentrated in areas of civil unrest. 88/ In 1957 and 1958 improvements in organization and control were inaugurated, PAVN taking on the structure and trappings of a Bloc-style professional army, with regularized pay scales, insignia, rank, and the like. During 1958 and 1959, to meet goals for manning collective farms, some divisions were reduced in personnel and converted to brigades. Conscription was introduced, the Armed Public Security Forces -- frontier and internal security troops -- formed, and the air and naval forces elevated in status. In 1960 and 1961 additional divisions were reduced to brigades, but since diversions to agriculture diminished, this was presumably to provide smaller, more manageable formations for the infiltration then underway into Laos, and in prospect for South Vietnam. In sum, with Bloc aid, the DRV more than doubled its effective infantry divisions from 6 in 1954 to 14 by 1962. U.S. intelligence credited the PAVN in 1954 with the capability, by concentrating all its resources on a single objective, of mounting an attack of limited duration using three divisions supported by direct artillery fire. By 1961, the U.S. rated the North Vietnam Army (NVA) as capable of a five division offensive backed by substantially greater logistic and combat support, including indirect artillery fires. 89/ The U.S. did not know

with certainty much further concerning the quality or quantity of Bloc aid during this period. Reports of the presence in North Vietnam of Soviet-design small arms, artillery, tanks, and trucks were received regularly by U.S. intelligence, but the proportion of these which were supplied by the Chinese could not be established. U.S. estimates held that Soviet aid predominated up until about 1960, and that thereafter Hanoi looked increasingly to Peking for supply of such items, as well as for ammunition of all types. 90/ By 1964, except for some remaining stocks of French weapons, all NVA mortars and recoilless rifles were reported to be of Chinese manufacture. Similarly, small arms such as SKS 7.62 mm rifles and K-53 and K-54 7.62 mm machine guns, though of Russian design, were thought to have been supplied by China. For heavier, more complex items (e.g., armored vehicles, heavy artillery, antiaircraft systems, aircraft, and the like), the DRV remained dependent on the Soviets.

### 3. The French Arms

In South Vietnam, the most significant military development in the immediate aftermath of Geneva was the withdrawal of the 200,000 men of the French Expeditionary Corps by 1956, apparently removing with them an estimated \$200 million worth of undetermined kinds of military equipment from \$1,308 million in MDAP materiel furnished them by the United States during the period 1950-1954. How precisely this draw-down affected the ceilings envisaged by Articles 16 and 17 of the Agreement was, of course, never established. 91/ The attention of the DRV and the ICC thereafter was fixed on the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces (RVNAF), and upon the United States military assistance program for RVNAF.

### 4. RVNAF Revitalized

The French brought the Vietnamese Army into being in 1948, its strength in 1949 being reported as 25,000, led by French officers and noncommissioned officers. 92/ That strength rose eight-fold during the war, to 50,000 in 1950; 65,800 in 1951; 150,000 in 1953; and 200,000 in 1954, including 1500 navy and 3500 air force personnel. Dien Bien Phu and its aftermath resulted in widespread desertions, especially from Vietnamese units being moved from north to south during the regroupment. 93/ Thereafter, under urging from the U.S., French officers and noncommissioned leaders were withdrawn, and a combined U.S.-French training mission was established to develop the national army. New force structures for military and paramilitary forces evolved, with particular emphasis upon headquarters, staffs, and logistic units. Strengths for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), for the same years given above for DRV armed forces, were as follows:



Trends in GVN Armed Strength 94/  
(in thousands)

	<u>Army</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>Mar Corps</u>	<u>AF</u>	<u>Provincial Forces</u>	<u>Coastal Forces</u>	<u>Militia</u>	<u>Total</u>
1954								200
1955	170	2.2	1.5	3.5	...	...	...	177
1959	136	4.3	2.0	4.6	49	...	48	244
1963	192	6.7	5.2	6.4	76	3.3	94	384

A sampling of arms is represented below:

U.S. Army MAP Ordnance in Vietnam 95/  
(Selected Items)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Deliveries FY 50-54</u>	<u>Inventory 1 Jan 58</u>	<u>Inventory 30 Nov 63</u>	<u>Deliveries FY 55-64</u>
Carbine, 30 cal	73,889	48,051	303,635	321,884
Rifle, 30 cal	111,667	83,828	122,166	118,153
Rifle, BAR	13,145	11,839	21,800	22,770
SMG	77,342	63,099	55,743	61,961
MG, 30 cal	2,558	3,143	5,679	5,534
RR, 57 mm	1,121	470	648	539
How, 105 mm	329	170	188	234
How, 155 mm	36	28	66	53
Mort, 60 mm	1,393	1,732	2,922	2,470
Mort, 81 mm	921	868	1,106	891
Mort, 4.2 in	-	99	268	250
Tank, light	270	130	176	131
Armored Car	398	140	104	146

## 5. U.S. Aid: SEATO

The role of the United States in the training and equipping of these forces mirrored the misapprehensions of other aspects of U.S. policy. In 1954 Secretary of State Dulles had drawn two principal lessons from the First Indochina War: (1) that it was impossible to support a belligerent in such a war unless he embodied the nationalistic aspirations of the people, and (2) collective action on behalf of that belligerent could not be drawn together amid the war. 96/ The first took the policy form of U.S. insistence upon a truly national army for South Vietnam, i.e., an army entirely free of French command. The second materialized as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. On 8 September 1954, the U.S., U.K. and France joined with Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand and agreed that: 97/

### Article IV

"1. Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes....

"2. If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.

"3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any State designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this Article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned...."

By a Protocol to the SEATO Treaty, executed the same day, the Parties:

"...unanimously designate for the purpose of Article IV of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam...."

Shortly after SEATO was formed, the U.S. and France agreed on direct U.S. aid for the Diem government; a joint communique issued 29 September reflected the U.S. belief that the French would remain a military power in South Vietnam: 98/



"...In order to contribute to the security of the area pending the further development of national forces for this purpose, the representatives of France indicated that France is prepared to retain forces of its Expeditionary Corps, in agreement with the government concerned, within the limits permitted under the Geneva Agreements, and to an extent to be determined....The channel for French and United States economic aid, budgetary support, and other assistance to each of the Associated States will be direct to that state...."

On 23 October 1954, President Eisenhower, in a letter to Diem, offered "to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means." 99/ Direct U.S. military assistance to Diem began in early 1955. As mentioned above, by spring, 1956, the French military command had been dissolved, and the Expeditionary Corps withdrawn, so that the U.S. thereafter alone bore the principal burdens of assisting the GVN to build its defenses.

#### 6. U.S. Aid: MAP

U.S. policy on how RVNAF should develop vacillated accordingly. Initially, we considered that the French forces and the SEATO mantle would suffice for the purposes of shielding the GVN from external aggression, and that as Lt. General John W. ("Iron Mike") O'Daniel, Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, put it in February, 1955: 100/

"The (Vietnamese) Army will be above all, according to American ideas on the subject, a police force capable of spotting Communist guerrillas and Communist efforts at infiltration."

The withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps, however, cast RVNAF in a new role, and demanded they be prepared for conventional combat, capable of staving off an attack from the North until U.S. and SEATO aid could be landed. 101/ In June, 1956, in the wake of the French withdrawal, General O'Daniel reported to the American Friends of Vietnam that: 102/

"The Vietnamese Army is now organized into regiments and divisions. In case of an armed attack by the Vietminh from the North, it is capable of effecting enough delay to allow for additional forces to be employed in time to save the country...."

To this threat MAAG turned its attention from 1955 to 1960, with such success that General O'Daniel's successor, Lt. General Samuel T. ("Hanging Sam") Williams could justifiably assert (on the occasion of his retirement

in August, 1960) that: 103/

"In 1954 the Communist army of North Vietnam could have crossed the seventeenth parallel and walked into Saigon standing up. Today if they tried it, they would have one nasty fight on their hands."

The Army of Vietnam (ARVN) assumed American forms, with divisions, corps headquarters, and general staffs -- an "upgrading" which appealed to the Vietnamese military, denied such pretensions under the French. Although the MAAG continued to recognize a requirement for assisting ARVN capabilities against guerrillas and infiltrators, the primary efforts of American and Vietnamese soldiers alike were directed toward improving conventional defense capability through 1960, and ARVN became mechanized, ponderous, road bound, and preoccupied with its supply and staffing functions. 104/ Indeed, MAAG viewed ARVN "pacification" duties as an obstruction to progress. The internal security of the nation devolved upon two paramilitary forces: the Self-Defense Corps, and the Civil Guard, U.S. aid for both of which comprised an unhappy chapter in the U.S.-GVN relationship. The Self-Defense Corps (SDC) was created in April, 1956, as a village militia, and received U.S. assistance from the MAAG in the form of funds and shoulder arms. Training of the SDC was left to ARVN. The Civil Guard (CG) was established in April 1955, as a paramilitary force which was to operate under the province chiefs. American aid to the CG was provided through a group from Michigan State University under contract to both the U.S. and the GVN. Its organization, equipment, and utilization became a point of controversy almost at once: the Public Administration Division of the Michigan State group conceived of the CG as a rural constabulary, recruited locally, trained and equipped for police operations; Diem preferred a more military organization, heavier in equipment, and organized for sustained combat. In terms of later U.S. concepts of "counterinsurgency," the early judgment of the MSU group was probably correct: a rural constabulary close to the people might have helped Diem meet the early challenges of the insurgency, especially in the field of intelligence. However, with MAAG support, Diem's ideas prevailed, and the CG became a force competitive to ARVN. In actuality both the SDC and the CG were quite ineffective in providing internal security. Their arms, equipment and training were rudimentary. ARVN used its training responsibilities for them as a dumping ground for inept officers. Through them, however, U.S. small arms were channeled into the countryside, there to augment the arsenals of dissidents. And the behavior of these ill-prepared levies probably did little to enhance GVN rapport with the farmers. 105/

From the outset, the American aid program for South Vietnam was overwhelmingly military. There was doubtless, always a limit to how much economic and other non-military aid the GVN needed, wanted, or could efficiently absorb, but primary emphasis in U.S. aid programs from the outset was placed upon security -- with Diem's agreement, as his 1956 letter (supra.) indicates. In the first few years, about 70% of all U.S. aid was for the security establishment. 106/ About 80% of



non-military economic aid was furnished in the form of "commodity imports," an arrangement in which the U.S. purchased imports for Vietnamese who paid for them in Vietnamese currency into a "counterpart fund." The counterpart funds, in turn, were made available for support of the GVN budget -- in 1956, 51% of all GVN expenditures were for defense.

#### 7. Implications: U.S. Role

Much criticism leveled at U.S. assistance for the GVN has cited its military character as evidence that the U.S. deliberately undermined or ignored the Geneva Settlement. SEATO has been similarly suspect, its formation having drawn an immediate DRV protest to the ICC in September 1954, that the treaty violated Article 19 of the "Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities..." forbidding alliances. 107/ However, U.S. official records reveal that the nature and direction of U.S. aid programs, with their emphasis on security, were dictated by no conscious effort to contravene the Settlement, but by the desires of the GVN, and by a mutual adjustment to the circumstances of French withdrawal. In late 1954, J. Lawton Collins, the U.S. Special Representative in Vietnam, recommended an ARVN of 77,000 and reported the French willing to have MAAG expand slowly beyond the Settlement-fixed mid-1954 level of 342. 108/ The JCS initially (September, 1954) viewed the Settlement as too restrictive, and enjoined against MAAG's accepting the mission of training RVNAF. However, Defense eventually took the view that while State Department would have to rule on a possible increase in MAAG strength, its 342 personnel were probably "capable of furnishing training assistance to develop Army and Navy internal security forces...." The build-up of DRV forces was perceived, and the JCS view was that this threat entailed retention of at least four divisions of French forces in the South until they could be replaced by combat effective RVNAF divisions. 109/ There followed a period of about six months, December 1954 to May 1955, in which the U.S. government debated within its councils whether or not to throw its entire support behind Ngo Dinh Diem, or to seek alternatives. However, while this debate was in progress, the U.S. followed through in adopting direct aid to GVN, and in extending its advisory effort with ARVN to replace French advisors -- steps explained as authorized by the Geneva Agreement in terms of rotation of personnel, and of implementing a 1950 pentilateral agreement for military aid among the U.S., France, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. 110/ Ultimately, Ngo Dinh Diem's success in breaking the power of the sects, as well as the inability of Americans to identify other leaders for the GVN, won him unequivocal American political support and agreement to support an RVNAF of about 150,000. Thus buttressed, Diem refused to open consultations on the plebescite in July 1955, and in October held an election of his own in which Bao Dai was deposed, and himself installed as head of state of the GVN. Diem then felt confident in requesting the French to remove their forces from Vietnam. The French withdrawal came certainly before ARVN was ready to replace the Expeditionary Corps divisions, and created urgency for MAAG to help develop minimal conventional defense capabilities.

## 8. Implications: DRV and GVN Protests

By the summer of 1955, the unfolding of U.S.-GVN policy prompted the DRV to appeal directly to the Co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference. In a letter of August 17, 1955, Pham Van Dong, DRV Prime Minister, insisted that "the political question in Vietnam should be settled according to the Geneva Agreements," and requested the U.S.S.R. and the U.K. to "take all necessary measures in order to guarantee observance...." 111/ This request was indorsed by the Chinese on October 31, 1955, and referred in November by the Co-chairmen to other members of the Geneva Conference for comment. The DRV promptly called for reconvening the Geneva Conference; the CPR quickly supported the demand. On February 18, 1956, the U.S.S.R. concurred, and proposed to the U.K. the summoning of a new Conference. The DRV call was based principally upon accusations that the GVN was frustrating execution of the political provisions of the Settlement, but a U.S.S.R. note to the U.K. added the charge that in South Vietnam, "foreign military bases are being set up and attempts are being made to include South Vietnam in a military bloc." The U.K. responses were cool to the idea that a reconvened Geneva Conference "would necessarily provide the quickest or most satisfactory means of reaching agreement," and on April 9, 1956, the U.K. made public a note to the U.S.S.R. rejecting its accusations concerning military bases and blocs, and countercharging "massive military expansion in the North," noting that while French troops had been withdrawn from the South, the army in North Vietnam had been increased from 7 to 20 (sic) divisions since 1954. 112/ The U.K. further took the position that the GVN was not bound by the Geneva Agreements. The outcome was a letter from the Co-chairmen to the DRV and the GVN enjoining cooperation to keep the peace, and asking notification when the recipients felt the time propitious for consultations preliminary to plebescite.

In July, 1959, the government of South Vietnam published a White Paper, summarizing the "violations of the Geneva Agreements by the Viet Minh communists." 113/ In it the "authorities of the North" were charged with a "policy of aggression and subversion," in that contrary to their 1954 pledges, they obstructed the movements of refugees, conducted widespread destruction and sabotage in South Vietnam, introduced large quantities of arms and ammunition into North Vietnam, and with communist cadres in South Vietnam pursued a scheme to overthrow the Republic of Vietnam. The GVN claimed that between September, 1954, and June, 1959, a total of 3,561 caches of arms and ammunition had been discovered in South Vietnam, of which 303 had been reported to the ICC. Although the 303 "most important" caches so reported contained only 679 rifles, 142 machine guns, 182 mortars, 49 pistols, and assorted mines, grenades and other munitions, the government of South Vietnam construed these to convey "the intention of further attacks against the national government...in violation of the Agreements...." It noted that the United Kingdom had cited in 1956 an increase in the DRV armed forces from 7 to 20 divisions and evoked the 1958 denunciation of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs for the DRV's increasing its military strength from a 1954 total of 200,000 to 550,000. The White Paper castigated Hanoi for "introducing 600 to 700 Chinese instructors" and noted that "the number of Russian and Chinese advisors amounts to several thousand in all echelons of the Army." Noting that the Geneva Accords had proscribed using one zone for conducting of aggression against



the other, the GVN condemned what were termed "national movements, such as 'Patriotic Front,' 'United Front,' or 'Fatherland Front,' [which] were in reality of communist inspiration...simply and solely directing communist propaganda and subversive agencies in the zone controlled by the national government." It claimed that responsive to orders from Hanoi, these organizations were conducting a systematic campaign of terror and subversion. During the two and one half years from 1957 through July, 1959, 174 assassinations involving 10 servicemen, 20 civil guards, 65 village officials and 59 civilians were reported by the GVN to the ICC. The White Paper concluded on the note that:

"Contrary to their official declarations, the Viet-Minh Communists have turned their back upon the interests of the Vietnamese people.

"Is it a question of the reunification of the country? They have conceived of it as a simple subordination to Red Imperialism. In North Vietnam, democratic liberties are scoffed at, sacred human rights trampled under foot. How could the Vietnamese people express their real will under this reign of terror where liberty is nothing but a word?

"Desirous to realize the reunification of the country through freedom and in freedom, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam has repeatedly, but in vain, summoned the Communists to re-establish and respect the fundamental liberties to which human beings are entitled. This appeal was made in order to create a favorable atmosphere for really free general elections.

"Not only are the Viet-Minh Communists enemies of democracy and freedom, but they continue to mobilize their forces to sabotage peace in this part of the world.

"The unceasing reinforcement of the Communist armed forces, the importation, in great numbers, of arms and munitions into North Vietnam, secret arm and ammunition dumps left in the territory of the Republic of Viet-Nam, subversive manoeuvres carried out by Communist cadres constitute tangible and irrefutable evidence of their deliberately aggressive intentions."

#### 9. Implications: ICC Impotence

In the meantime, the ICC tried to engage the Geneva Conference machinery to provide a substitute for France in Vietnam, with no better success than the DRV. Acting on an ICC report, the U.K. made representations to the GVN in December, 1955, on behalf of the ICC, but received no reply until April, 1956, in which the GVN promised to cooperate with the ICC, but again declined to accept responsibility for the Geneva Settlement. In May, 1956, the Co-chairmen asked the ICC to remain functioning beyond its contemplated termination in July, 1956, despite the informality of its relations with the GVN. The ICC agreed, on May 27, 1956, to "continue dealing with the parties concerned on the basis of 'status quo.'" 114/ "Status quo" by that time involved the ICC directly with the U.S. aid program. For example, in April, 1956, the GVN notified the ICC through the French that it had accepted a U.S. proposal to augment the U.S. MAAG in May 1956, with a 350-member group to be called the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM), tasked to assist in the evacuation of U.S. military equipment and supplies left

behind upon the French withdrawal. Despite an ICC request to delay deployment while the matter was under advisement, TERM personnel arrived on schedule, and without ICC sanction. In 1957 the ICC protested the circumstances of TERM's introduction, but was content with requesting a periodic report of its activities. 115/ The same 1957 report delivered an ICC opinion that SEATO was not a U.S.-GVN alliance prescribed by the Geneva Settlement, and a 1958 report put the ICC on record (the Polish member dissenting) that the GVN might be given "credit" for the war material withdrawn by the French prior to 30 June 1956 in accepting like equipment from the U.S. 116/ A 1959 report ruled that Bien Hoa was not a new military base, and authorized TERM to remain until 31 December 1960. In 1960 the ICC acceded to an increase in the MAAG from 342 to 685 personnel. 117/

Nonetheless, it is clear on the record that U.S. and GVN cooperation with the ICC was little more than pro forma. Convinced that the ICC was impotent in inhibiting the behavior or restricting the arming of the DRV, both the U.S. and the GVN pursued their goals without serious regard for the fixed levels of arms envisaged at Geneva, or for attempts by the ICC to regulate arms. Both governments appreciated that the inability of the other Geneva Conference powers to concert action, well demonstrated in the spring of 1956, constituted international condonement of status quo in Vietnam, and while both apparently preferred to avoid controversy with the ICC, neither was disposed to consider the ICC or the Settlement it guarded as other than a secondary consideration to GVN security.

#### E. The Situation in 1956

On June 1, 1956, a prestigious group of citizens assembled in Washington as the "American Friends of Vietnam." They heard Senator John F. Kennedy characterize Vietnam as: 118/

"(1)...the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch, the finger in the dike...The fundamental tenets of this nation's foreign policy, in short, depend in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation.

"(2)...Vietnam represents a proving ground of democracy in Asia...the alternative to Communist dictatorship. If this democratic experiment fails, if some one million refugees have fled the totalitarianism of the North only to find neither freedom nor security in the South, then weakness, not strength, will characterize the meaning of democracy in the minds of still more Asians....

"(3)...Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia. If we are not the parents of little



Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents...If it falls victim to any of the perils that threaten its existence...our prestige in Asia will sink to a new low.

"(4)...~~The~~ key position of Vietnam in Southeast Asia... makes inevitable the involvement of this nation's security in any new outbreak of trouble."

Senator Kennedy was followed by Walter S. Robertson, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, who declared that the U.S. sought: 119/

"To support a friendly non-Communist government in Vietnam and to help it diminish and eventually eradicate Communist subversion and influence.

"To help the government of Vietnam establish the forces necessary for internal security.

"To encourage support for Free Vietnam by the non-Communist world.

"To aid in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a country and people ravaged by eight ruinous years of civil and international war.

"Our efforts are directed first of all toward helping sustain the internal security forces consisting of a regular army of about 150,000 men, and mobile civil guard of some 45,000 and local defense units which are being formed to give protection against subversion on the village level...."

Dr. Tom Dooley described emotionally the plight of the refugees from North Vietnam, and sketched in graphic terms Viet Minh terrorism. Professor Hans Morganthau extolled the Geneva Settlement and status quo in Vietnam as a logical balancing of the interests of the powers concerned, and General O'Daniel described how the Vietnamese had been given the opportunity to select the type of military organization they like best, and had "followed the U.S. pattern." 120/

But from Saigon, Ngo Dinh Diem addressed a sober, reflective letter to the American Friends of Vietnam on the note that "we have arrived at a critical point in our national life." He concluded with the assertion that: "It is indispensable that our army have the wherewithal to become increasingly capable of preserving the peace which we seek....Economic aid can be only effective once security is restored...." 121/

From Hanoi to the peoples of Southeast Asia, a commentary on the 1 June conference in Washington was broadcast in Vietnamese headlines:

"The American Colonialists Are the Most Dangerous Enemy of the People." 122/  
The commentary castigated the American Friends of Vietnam for supporting Diem in "his sabotage of the Geneva Accords and opposition to the clauses relative to free general elections to unify the country. It is obvious that this association is an organization formed by the American imperialists to more cynically and bluntly intervene in the South...." and called for solidarity against the American intrusion.

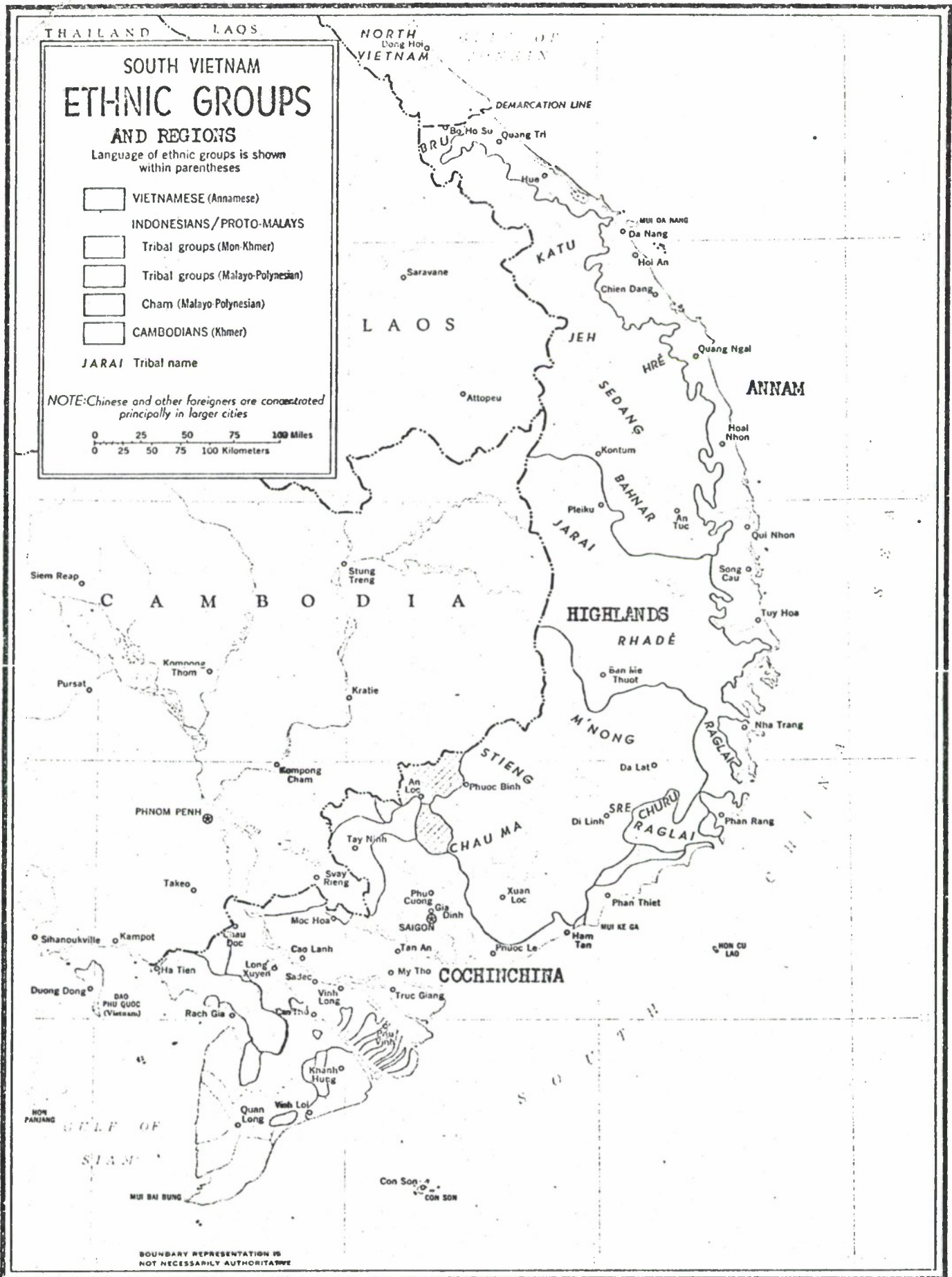
However, July 20, 1956, the date the Geneva Conference had indicated for the plebescite on reunification, passed without incident. Years later, when controversy over the failure of the Geneva Settlement raged anew, the U.S. would point to the subsequent behavior of the DRV to demonstrate that its judgment was quite correct in arming the GVN, aiding the refugees, and insisting with Diem that conditions permitting free elections did not exist in North Vietnam. 123/ But in that summer of 1956, most such arguments appeared to be settled to the satisfaction of all parties except Ho Chi Minh.



REBELLION AGAINST MY-DIEMA. Diem's Political Legacy: Violence and Anti-Colonialism

World War II and the First Indochina War left the society of South Vietnam severely torn. The Japanese, during the years of their presence from 1940-1945, had encouraged armed factionalism to weaken the French administration and strengthen their own position. 1/ The war between the Viet Minh and the French -- which began in South Vietnam in September, 1945 -- wrought further disunity. Paradoxically, the South suffered political damage compared to the North from having been the secondary theater of both wars. The Japanese had sought during World War II to control it without sizable occupation forces. Similarly, in the First Indochina War, the French had practiced economy of force in the South so that they could concentrate in Tonkin. For conventional forces, both the Japanese and the French substituted irregular warfare and a system of bribes, subversion, arms, military advice, and officially condoned concessions in corruption. From 1945-1954, the fighting in South Vietnam was more sporadic and diffuse than in the North, but in a societal sense, ultimately more destructive. While in Tonkin the Viet Minh flowed in through and behind the French and continued to build a nation and unify the people with surprising efficiency, in the South they were unable to do so. Not only were the Viet Minh centers of power in the North and the China base area too remote to support effectively the southern insurgency, but also the French had imitated the Japanese in arming and supplying certain South Vietnamese factions, fomenting civil war against the southern arm of the Viet Minh. The results approached anarchy: a virtual breakdown in public administration by Franco-Vietnamese central governments and deep cleavages within the Vietnamese body politic. By the summer of 1954, conspiracy had become the primary form of political communication in South Vietnam, and violence the primary mode of political change.

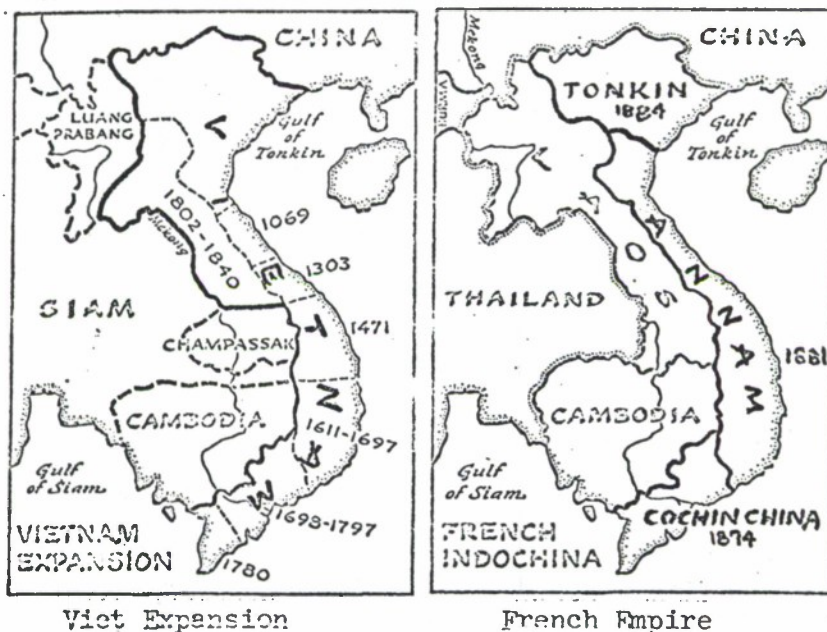
Politically, as well as geographically, South Vietnam consisted of three distinctive regions: the narrow, coastal plain of Annam, thickly settled by Vietnamese, where was located Hue, the ancient Viet capital and cultural center; the Highlands, sparsely populated by Montagnard tribesmen, in which was situated the summer capital of Dalat; and Cochinchina, the fertile, densely peopled river-delta area in which Saigon stood (see maps, ff.). Cochinchina had experienced a political development markedly different from that of Annam. The last area of modern







Vietnam to be occupied by the Viet people in their expansion southward (8th Century, A.D.), and the first area to fall to French rule (mid-19th Century), Cochinchina had been administered by the French directly as a colony, while Annam remained under the Emperor as a French protectorate.



## HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF VIETNAM 2/

### Dates of Conquest

While the mandarin rule of the Annamese court was more a matter of form than substance, Annam's public administration preserved a degree of unity among the Vietnamese despite the impress of French culture. In South Vietnam, the French seemed to be a wholly divisive influence. Though Cochinchina was the site of some of the achievements of which French colonialists were most proud -- the chief seat of the rubber industry, and focus of major feats of engineering with canals and railroads -- the Cochinchinese seem to recall less the triumphs of French civilization than its burdens: the French rubber plantations, abrasive with their labor, high-handed with local peoples; the oppressive taxes, and the French controlled monopolies on salt, alcohol and opium; recurrent famine in the midst of one of the earth's richest farming regions; socially restrictive schooling; modernizing challenges to familial piety, village centralism, and other cherished fundamentals of Viet culture. 3/ While Annam -- and Tonkin to the north -- developed indigenous political movements opposing French rule, these were mainly foreign-based, foreign-oriented parties, such as the Nationalist Party (VNQDD), a Vietnamese

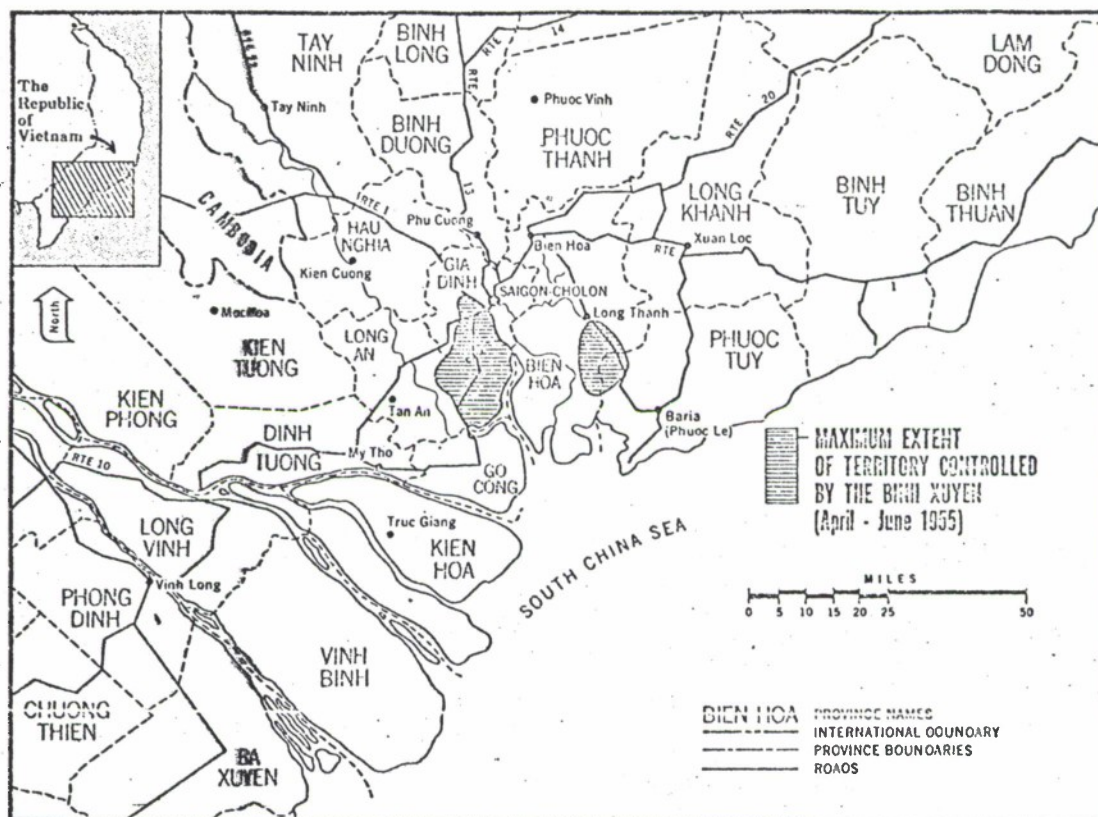


copy of the Kuomintang, or the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) of the Comintern, headed by Russian-trained Ho Chi Minh. In Cochinchina, however, there emerged a number of nationalist movements peculiar to that region, or principally based on that region. Saigon, for example, developed a range of leftist movements competitive with the ICP, including two Trotskyite parties, as well as a number of VNQDD splinter movements, and a politically active gangster fraternity, the Binh Xuyen. But the important differences were in the countryside, where millions of Vietnamese joined wholly Cochinchinese religious sects which propagated xenophobic nationalism, established theocracies, and fielded armed forces. French and Japanese policy had deliberately fostered conflict among these several factions to the extent that Cochinchina was, in 1954, literally fractioned among the religious sects, the Binh Xuyen, and the Viet Minh. While by 1954 the Viet Minh dominated Annam and the Highlands, control of Cochinchina eluded them, for all their ruthless efficiency.

### 1. The Binh Xuyen

Saigon itself in 1954 was under the rule of the Binh Xuyen, a secret society of brigands evolved from the Black Flag pirates which had for generations preyed on the city's commerce. <sup>4/</sup> The Binh Xuyen ethos included a fierce - albeit eclectic - nationalism. They collaborated with the Japanese during World War II, and in September, 1945, led the savage attack against the French in Saigon which marked the start of the Franco-Viet Minh War. The Binh Xuyen leader, Le Van (Bay) Vien, subsequently contracted an alliance with the Viet Minh, allied his 1300 soldiers with their guerrillas, and served for a time as the Viet Minh deputy commander for Cochinchina and one of its chief sources of funds. Bay Vien's refusal to assassinate certain Viet Minh-condemned Vietnamese intellectuals reputedly stirred Viet Minh misgivings, and called the Binh Xuyen favorably to the attention of the National United Front, an anti-communist, Viet nationalist group then operating out of Shanghai. In 1947, Bay Vien was persuaded to cooperate with the National United Front. Informed, the Viet Minh invited him to the Plain of Reeds in an attempt to capture him. Bay Vien escaped, and thereupon threw in his lot with the French and the State of Vietnam, accepting a commission as the first colonel of the Vietnamese National Army. <sup>5/</sup> Bay Vien afterwards paid Bao Dai what Colonel Lansdale termed "a staggering sum" for control of gambling and prostitution in Cholon, and of the Saigon-Cholon police. The French accepted the arrangement because Bay Vien offset the Viet Minh threat to Saigon. By 1954, Bay Vien was operating "Grande Monde," a gambling slum in Cholon; "Cloche d'Or," Saigon's preeminent gambling establishment; the "Noveautes Catinat," Saigon's best department store; a hundred smaller shops; a fleet of river boats; and a brothel, spectacular even by Asian standards, known as the Hall of Mirrors. Besides a feudal fief south of Saigon, he owned an opium factory and distribution system, and held substantial interests in fish, charcoal, hotels, and rubber plantations. Besides the police apparatus and other followers numbering 5000 to 8000, he had some 2500 soldiers

at his disposal. He ruled Saigon absolutely; not even Viet Minh terrorists were able to operate there. Moreover, he exercised significant influence over the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao leaders.



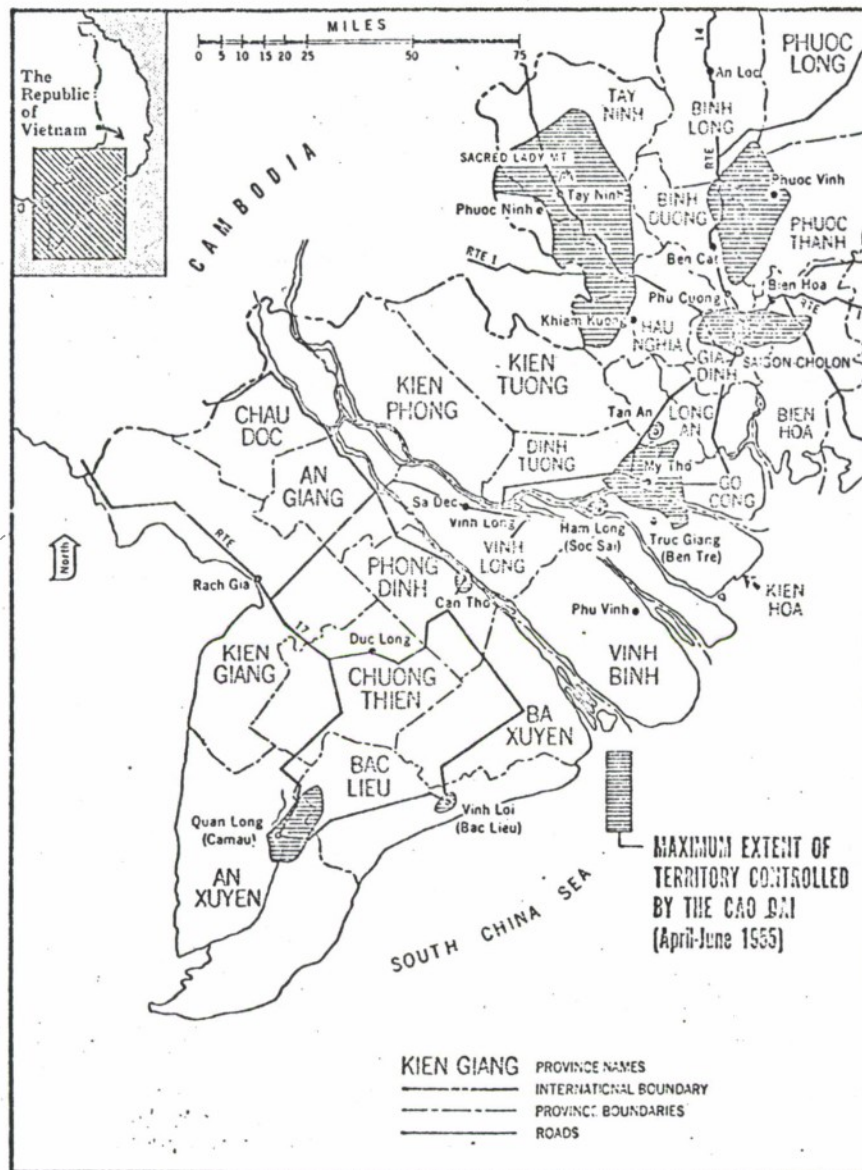
*The Binh Xuyen*

## 2. The Cao Dai

The Cao Dai were a religious sect founded by a colonial bureaucrat named Ngo Van Chieu, who with one Pham Cong Tac conducted a series of spiritualist seances from which emerged a new religious faith, and in the early 1920's, a "church" with clerical organization similar to Roman Catholicism. 6/ The doctrine of the Cao Dai was syncretic, melding veneration of Christ, Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tze with a curious occultism which deified such diverse figures as Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, and Sun Yat Sen. With the dissolution of the authority of the central government during the 1940's and early 1950's, the Cao Dai acquired increasing political and military autonomy. The sect's 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 faithful comprised a loose theocracy centered in Tay Ninh, the border province in northwest of Saigon. The Cao Dai, too, cooperated first with the Japanese, and then with the Viet Minh; and the Cao Dai leadership also found the latter uncomfortable allies. In 1947, the Cao Dai realigned with the French, agreeing to secure with their forces



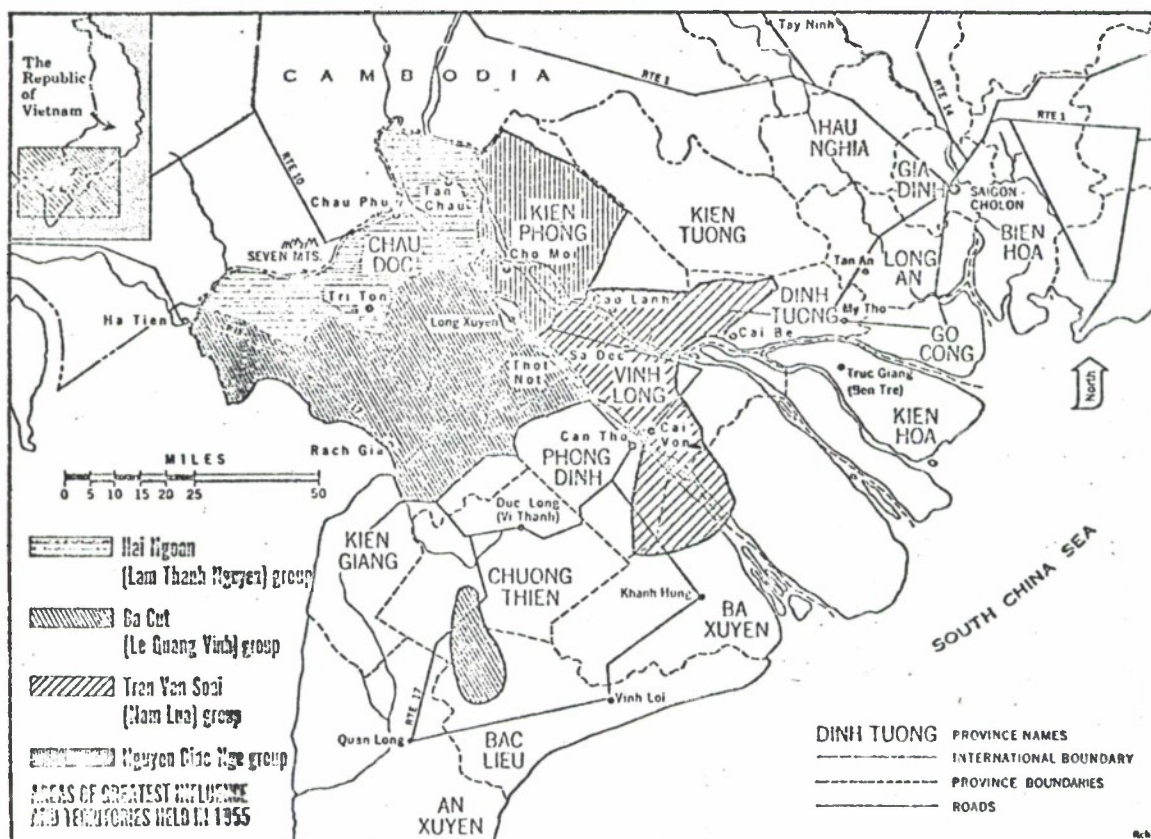
specified rural areas against the Viet Minh in return for military assistance. Although plagued throughout its history by minor heresy and factional disputes, the Cao Dai became the largest political movement in Cochinchina; the Cao Dai shared with the Hoa Hao the distinction of being the only important political forces to originate in the Vietnamese peasantry. When Diem came to power in 1954, Pham Cong Tac, the Cao Dai Pope, had declared for Bao Dai, controlled some 15,000 to 20,000 armed followers, and ruled the region northwest of Saigon.



*The Cao Dai*

### 3. The Hoa Hao

Southwest of Saigon there existed the Hoa Hao, a newer sect, similarly endowed with politico-military autonomy, which repeatedly clashed with the Cao Dai and the Binh Xuyen. 7/ In 1939, a mystic faith healer named Huynh Phu So, from a village named Hoa Hao, launched a reformed Hinayana Buddhist movement which swiftly acquired a wide following. (Among the Vietnamese whom Huynh Phu So favorably impressed was Ngo Dinh Diem.) Huynh Phu So enjoyed Japanese protection, and with their aid, in 1944 the Hoa Hao formed armed bands, among the leaders of which there was one Tran Van Soai. A Viet Minh attempt to gain the assistance of the Hoa Hao failed, and the Viet Minh on 8 September 1945 massacred hundreds of Hoa Hao faithful in the town of Can Tho. Tran Van Soai replied in kind, and in the ensuing weeks Can Tho became the center of extensive slaughter. French intervention stopped the violence, but turned the Hoa Hao against the French. In April, 1947, the Viet Minh executed Huynh Phu So, which caused Tran Van Soai to rally with 2,000 armed men to the French. He was accepted into the French Expeditionary Corps with the rank of general, and assigned the mission of pacifying his own region. The French from that time forward, until 1955, paid the salaries of the Hoa Hao soldiers. At the time Diem came to office in 1954, the sect had some 1,500,000 believers, controlled most of the Mekong Delta region, and had 10,000 to 15,000 men under arms.



*The Hoa Hao*



#### 4. The Viet Minh

In 1954, the Viet Minh controlled some 60 to 90 percent of South Vietnam's villages (by French estimates) and 30 to 40 percent of its territory (by U.S. estimates). 8/ The bulk of organized Viet Minh forces were located in Annam and the Highlands, proximate to Tonkin, and in regions free of competition from the armed sects. In Cochinchina, they were militarily strongest in areas along the Cambodian border and in the Camau peninsula of the extreme south remote from the principal concentrations of people. 9/ Nonetheless, their political organization was pervasive, and in some localities, e.g., Quang Ngai province in Annam, the Viet Minh were the only effective government. A hierarchy of Viet Minh committees paralleled the formal government from the village Administrative and Resistance Committee (ARC) through district, province, and what the Viet Minh termed "interzone" or "region." No reliable estimates exist of the numbers of cadres involved in this apparatus, but Viet Minh military forces of all types south of the 17th parallel probably numbered around 100,000. 10/ When orders were issued for the Geneva regroupment, the "provisional assembly areas" designated coincided with the areas in which Viet Minh strength had been greatest. During the time allowed for collecting forces for the move north, the Viet Minh evidently undertook to bank the fires of revolution by culling out of their units trained and reliable cadres for "demobilization," "recruiting" youth -- forcibly in many instances -- to take their place, and caching weapons. 11/ Particularly in Annam and the Highlands, then, the Viet Minh posed a significant challenge to Ngo Dinh Diem. His test of strength with the Viet Minh, however, was to be deferred by the Geneva Settlement and DRV policy for some years.

#### 5. Anti-colonialism

The political prospects of Ngo Dinh Diem when he accepted the premiership from Bao Dai were dimmed not only by Viet Minh residue, and by the existence of the armed sects, but by the taint of colonialism. As far as most Cochinchinese peasants were concerned, Diem was linked to Bao Dai, and to the corrupt, French dominated government he headed. Studies of peasant attitudes conducted in recent years have demonstrated that for many, the struggle which began in 1945 against colonialism continued uninterrupted throughout Diem's regime: in 1954, the foes of nationalists were transformed from France and Bao Dai, to Diem and the U.S. -- My-Diem, American-Diem, became the universal term of Viet Cong opprobrium -- but the issues at stake never changed. 12/ There was, moreover, some substance to the belief that Diem represented no change, in that, although Ngo Dinh Diem took office before the Geneva Settlement as prime minister with "full powers civil and military," he did not acquire actual administrative autonomy until September, 1954; proclaim independence until January, 1955; or take command of his army until February, 1955. 13/ There was perforce a significant carry-over of

civil servants from the pre-Diem days. The national flag and the national anthem remained unchanged. 14/ Moreover, the laws remained substantially as they had been: the land-holdings, against which was directed much peasant discontent, were based on pre-Diem law; and old legal proscriptions against nationalist political activities remained on the books during Diem's tenure of office. The onus of colonialism was among the heavy burdens which Ngo Dinh Diem had to shoulder from the outset.

## B. Ngo Dinh Diem: Basis of Power

### 1. Political Origins

Why amid the military disasters of spring 1954, Bao Dai, head of the State of Vietnam, chose Ngo Dinh Diem from among other Vietnamese nationalists to form a government, has long been debated. Diem was an Annamese Catholic who in his youth had some experience in public administration, first as governor of Phan Thiet province, and then Minister of Interior at Bao Dai's Imperial Court in Hue. 15/ In 1933 Diem discovered, after a year in the latter office, that reforms he had been promised were being blocked by high French and Annamite officials. He promptly resigned his office and went into political retirement -- an act which earned him modest fame for integrity. Through the years of war and distress in his homeland thereafter, Diem had hewed to attentisme, and by refusing public office, had avoided the political discoloration which besmirched more involved Viet nationalists. Bao Dai had sought him for his premier in 1945, Ho Chi Minh for the DRV government in 1946, the French for their "solutions" in 1947 and 1949 -- all unsuccessfully. Hence, Diem's reputation for incorruptible nationalism, to the extent that he enjoyed one in 1954, was based on an event 20 years old and a long period of political aloofness. He did come from a prominent family; a brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc was a leading Catholic clergyman with countrywide connections, and the family proper retained some considerable influence in Annam. But his personal handicaps were considerable: bachelor, ascetic, shy, inexperienced, he seemed ill-fit for the seething intrigues of Saigon.

One school of conjecture holds that the French pressed him upon Bao Dai in the belief that under him the newly independent State of Vietnam would founder; 16/ another that Bao Dai advanced him to power convinced that his inevitable failure would eliminate him as a political competitor. 17/ There are those who believe that Diem was foisted upon the Vietnamese and the French by a cabal of prominent American Catholics and a CIA agent. 18/ It can be said that Diem was relatively well acquainted among leading Americans, and that Bao Dai might correctly have regarded Diem's contacts in the United States as a possible source of support for Vietnam. 19/ Whatever the reasons for his selection, however, at the time he took office there were few who regarded Diem as promising, and fewer still openly willing to back him. Indeed, from the time he took office on 7 July 1954, until the following May, he stood



virtually alone. Unaided by Bao Dai, opposed by the French, and proffered by Americans mainly advice, criticism, and promises -- but scant material assistance -- Ngo Dinh Diem in ten months surmounted the partition of his nation by the Geneva powers, two threatened military coups by his Army Chiefs of Staff, frenetic clashes with the Binh Xuyen armed sects, the withdrawal of the Viet Minh, and the influx of 900,000 refugees from North Vietnam.

## 2. Early U.S.-Diem Relations

Diem's durability was one of those surprises in Vietnam which prompted Americans thereafter to refer to the "miracle in Vietnam." On 7 December 1954, Senator Mansfield judged that U.S. "prospects for helping Diem strengthen and uphold South Vietnam look very dim." 20/ U.S. Ambassador Heath reported from Saigon on 17 December 1954 a dim view of Diem's chances since "there is every evidence that the French do not want Diem to succeed." 21/ In a January, 1955, report to the National Security Council, General J. Lawton Collins agreed with both analyses. 22/ On 7 April 1955, Collins cabled from Saigon that: "...it is my considered judgment that the man lacks the personal qualities of leadership and the executive ability successfully to head a government that must compete with the unity of purpose and efficiency of the Viet Minh under Ho Chi Minh." 23/ On 19 April, Collins again cabled: "I see no alternative to the early replacement of Diem." 24/

On 26 April 1955, U.S. National Intelligence Estimate 63.1-2-55, "Possible Developments in South Vietnam," took the view that:

"A political impasse exists in Saigon where the legally constituted government of Premier Diem is being challenged by a venal special interest group, the Binh Xuyen, which controls the National Security Police, and is temporarily allied with some elements of the religious sects....

"Even if the present impasse were resolved, we believe that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress toward developing a strong, stable anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva agreement, and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists...."

But opinion in Washington swung sharply when, in late April, Diem managed to survive a severe test of arms with his army and the sects. Senators Mansfield and Knowland issued strong statements of support for him, and on May 2 Senator Hubert Humphrey told the Senate that:

"Premier Diem is the best hope that we have in South Vietnam. He is the leader of his people. He deserves and must have the wholehearted support of the American Government and our foreign policy. This is no time for uncertainty or half-hearted measures....He is the only man on the political horizon of Vietnam who can rally a substantial degree of support of his people...If we have any comments about the leadership in Vietnam let it be directed against Bao Dai.... If the Government of South Vietnam has not room for both these men, it is Bao Dai who must go...." 25/

On 9 May 1955, the Joint Chiefs of Staff judged that "the government of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem shows the greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam." 26/ Five months later, on 11 October, 1955, the National Intelligence Estimate was revised. In NIE 63.1-3-55, "Probable Developments in Vietnam to July 1956," the U.S. Intelligence Advisory Committee found it possible to be more sanguine concerning Diem's prospects:

"...Diem has made considerable progress toward establishing the first fully independent Vietnamese government.... He faced a basically unstable and deteriorating situation.... The most significant articulate political sentiments of the bulk of the population was an antipathy for the French combined with a personal regard for Ho Chi Minh as the symbol of Vietnamese nationalism....

"Diem was forced to move slowly. Although possessing considerable national prestige as a patriot, he was inexperienced in administration and was confronted at the outset by the intrigues of Bao Dai and other self-interested individuals and groups, who in many cases benefited from French support....

"Diem concentrated on eliminating or neutralizing the most important groups and individuals challenging the authority of his government....By bribery, persuasion, and finally force, Diem virtually eliminated the Binh Xuyen and the most important elements of the Hoa Hao sects as threats to his authority. At the same time, he maneuvered the Cao Dai--the strongest of the sects--into an uneasy alliance. As a result of these successful actions, Diem gained prestige and increased popularity as a symbol of Diem's efforts to establish a viable anti-communist government are still in doubt....

"Provided the Communists do not exercise their capabilities to attack across the 17th Parallel or to initiate large-scale guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam, Diem will probably make further progress in developing a more effective government. His position will probably be strengthened as a result of increased



popular support, the continued loyalty of the VNA, and a deterioration in the strength and cohesiveness of his non-Communist opposition. The national government will probably increase the number of rural communities under its control, particularly in areas now held by the sects...."

It is likely that Diem's stormy first 10 months in office, June, 1954 to May, 1955, strongly conditioned his behavior in later years. He must have been impressed almost at once with the political importance of the army, and the essentiality of personally loyal ranking officers. He chose openly to oppose the armed sects against the advice of both his American and French advisers, and his success no doubt instilled confidence in his own judgments. The same events probably gave him reason thereafter to value head-on confrontation with a foe over conciliation or compromise. And in his adamant stand against consultations with the DRV on plebiscite, again contrary to initial American advice, he no doubt learned that on major issues the U.S. stake in his future was sufficiently high that he could lead, and American policy would follow. 27/ In any event, he moved with new assurance from mid-1955 forward. In many respects his first 300 days were his finest hours, when he was moving alone, rapidly, and with determination against great odds.

### 3. Political Concepts: Family Centralism and Personalism

But Diem's early victories were essentially negative, in eliminating or bypassing obstacles. It remained for him to provide programs for finding homes and occupations for the refugees, for solving the politically crucial problems of rural land distribution and taxation, for installing capable and incorrupt public administrators, for stimulating the economy, for improving the education system -- in short, for coping with the whole broad range of problems of governing a developing nation, each rendered especially acute by South Vietnam's war trauma, internal dissention, and partition from North Vietnam. To cite but a few: 600,000 refugees were dependent on his government for subsistence; 85,000 people were jobless as a result of the French troop withdrawal; inter-provincial communications were impaired -- 700 miles of main road were war-damaged, one third of the railway trackage lay destroyed, 68 concrete bridges on 860 miles of track lay blown. 28/ In devising programs to meet these challenges, Diem worked from two primal concepts: family centralism, and "personalism" as a state philosophy.

Diem was raised in a Mandarin family, born to a tradition of high position in the social hierarchy and governmental bureaucracy. It was also a Catholic family, and Diem received a heritage of obdurate devotion to Christianity under intense persecution -- within a century of his birth one hundred relatives had been burned to death by Buddhists in central Annam. His rearing developed his reverence for the past, a capacity for hard work, and a deep seated piety. Two French authorities

believed that his outlook on life was "born of a profound, of an immense nostalgia for the Vietnamese past, of a desperate filial respect for the society of ancient Annam." 29/ There was some thought of his becoming a priest, but he elected public administration; his elder brother Thuc, the cleric, is said to have speculated that Diem found himself too inflexible, too willful, too severe for the priesthood. 30/ But above all else, Diem's early years impressed upon him the importance of family in performing the duties of station: the family was the first means of extending personal power, the essential mode of political expression. It is possible that Diem resorted to nepotism simply because he lacked a personal political apparatus which would have permitted him to operate otherwise, but nepotism became the style of his rule, and it was quite consistent with his upbringing.

"Society," said Diem, "functions through personal relations among men at the top." 31/ One brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, received the title of Advisor to the President, and controlled the semi-covert Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party. His wife, Madame Nhu, became the President's official hostess, a deputy in the National Assembly, and the founder-chairman of the Woman's Solidarity Movement. Her father became one of Diem's ambassadors, and his wife the GVN observer at the UN. A second brother of Diem, Ngo Dinh Can, became the virtual overlord of Annam, holding no official position, but ruling the region in all respects. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, the Archbishop of Hue and Primate of Vietnam, also held no office, but functioned as Presidential advisor, and levered Catholic opinion on behalf of Diem. A fourth brother, Ngo Dinh Luyen, became an Ambassador. Three family members--Tran Van Chuong, Tran Van Do, and Tran Van Bac--served in Diem's first cabinet, and two other in-laws, Nguyen Huu Chau and Tran Trung Dung, held the key portfolios of Secretary of State at the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State for National Defense. One of the reasons General Collins opposed Diem may be a letter he received in April, 1955, from a group of nationalists headed by former Premier Nguyen Phan Long, urging the United States to withdraw its support of Diem on the grounds that his brothers were effectively isolating Diem politically. 32/ The observation proved to be correct: Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can increasingly gathered power into their own hands, and non-family politicians found themselves quietly shunted aside. Gradually, a concentration of power also occurred within the family circle, again toward Nhu, Mme. Nhu and Can, and at the expense of the more remotely related. The President's family thus became an entirely extra-legal elite which in class and geographic origin, as well as religion, was distinct from the South Vietnamese as a whole.

The Diem family circle was promptly targeted by gossipers. In Saigon, rumors were the political medium, and stories were soon rampant that members of the family were looting the government. 33/ By 1957, the whispering campaign against the Nhus mounted to such proportions that they issued a public statement denying that they had ever removed



money from the country, engaged in financial or commercial speculation, or accepted bribes. But the impression remained, fed by numerous credible reports of official graft at lower levels, that whether or not the Diem family took for personal gain, they took.

Another disadvantage proceeded from the Diem's familial concentration of power: bureaucratic overcentralization; Diem himself seems to have been peculiarly at fault in this instance, reserving for himself the power of decision in minute matters, and refusing to delegate authority to subordinates who might have relieved him of a crushing administrative burden. 34/ In part, this may have been simply inexperience in handling a large enterprise, but there seems to have been deeper, philosophical reasons -- a passion for perfection, a distrust of other men, a conviction that all subordinates required his paternalistic guidance. The result was an impairment of an administrative system already crippled by the absence of French civil servants. Subordinate officials, incapable of making decisions, fearful of making them, or forbidden to make them, passed upward even minute matters on paper to the brothers Ngo, glutting the communications of government, and imposing long delays on all, even important actions.

Personalism, as Diem called his personal political philosophy, was a melange of Asian and European notions which resembled the French Catholic personnalisme of Emmanuel Mounier, or the Encyclicals of Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI. 35/ More accurately, it was a blend of Christianity, Marxism, and Confucianism which stressed the development of each individual's moral character as the basis for community progress toward democracy. Diem saw himself as a reformer, even a revolutionary, in the moral realm. His central social message was that each citizen achieved moral fulfillment or harmony only if he applied himself energetically to his civic duties, avoiding on the one hand the selfishness of capitalism, and on the other, the selflessness of Marxist collectivism. "The basis for democracy can only be a spiritual one," 36/ said Diem in his Message to the National Assembly on the Constitution of 1956, and in New Delhi in 1957, he took Asians to task for losing sight of the spiritual essence of their political traditions: 37/

"...Does not our spirituality of which we are so proud, simply conceal a narrow conservatism and a form of escapism from concrete responsibility?...Has not Buddhist compassion become a pretext for not practicing justice...And is not tolerance, which so many can mistake for freedom, the result of paternalistic indulgence?"

And the same year, in Korea, he spoke of his hopes for restoring the spiritual strength of Vietnam after "the tremendous material and political difficulties which assailed Vietnam after Geneva had plunged even the best of her sons into a state of apprehension colored with despair..." 38/

"We pursue two aims.

"First we want to rearm the Vietnamese citizen morally and to make him impervious to all tyranny, whatever its origin.

"Second, we want to reinforce the spiritual cohesion of the Vietnamese people, cohesion which accounts for capacity to enjoy a largely decentralized system without falling into anarchy. Yet this cohesion has been largely shaken by the impact of the west.

"Yet man does not live only by the idea of liberty. He must be given a minimum of material support which will guarantee that liberty..."

A GVN approved biography of Diem explained that he recognized in communism the antithesis of true freedom, precisely because communism denied the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Personalism was the answer therefore to communism, since: 39/

"Personalism is a system based on the divine, therefore spiritual law, which...extols man's transcendent value... The practice of Personalism is symbolic of good citizenship with a highly developed civic spirit..."

Late in Diem's reign, when his combat with the communists had been fully joined, these vague precepts were elaborated by his brother, Nhu, but hardly clarified: 40/

"The personalist conception holds that freedom in an under-developed society is not something that is simply given or bestowed. It can only be achieved through militancy and vigilance, by doing away with all pretensions and pretexts for not realistically applying ourselves to our goals. In a situation of underdevelopment, and during a bleeding war of internal division, it may be argued that there is reason enough not to seek to develop democracy, but our personalist approach is precisely militant in denying this. Human rights and human dignity are not static phenomena. They are only possibilities which men must actively seek and deserve, not just beg for. In this sense, of believing in the process of constantly perfecting of oneself in moral as well as practical ways our personalist approach is similar to Confucianism. Personalism stresses hard work, and it is the working class, the peasants, who are better able to understand the concept than the intellectuals. We must use Personalist methods to realize democracy at the level where people are fighting and working, and in our new scale of values it is those who participate physically and selflessly in the fight against communism who are most privileged, then those who courageously serve the villages without profit, and finally those who engage diligently in productive labor for their own as well as for their villages' benefit..."

Some American observers found these ideas with their emphasis on "democracy" reassuring. Others, including General Edward Lansdale, urged on Diem a broader ideological stratagem of forming a "front" embracing the concepts of the more traditional Viet nationalist parties. 41/ But



"personalism," like Diem's Spanish-style Catholicism, harbored little tolerance; merely different political theories were interpreted as competitive, and even dangerous. Personalism thus limited Diem's political horizons, and almost certainly impaired his government's ability to communicate with the peasantry. "Personalism" became the official philosophy of the state, and though government employees were required to attend weekly sessions on its tenets, it never succeeded in becoming much more than the cant of Diem's administration, and the credo of the two political parties organized and directly controlled by his family.

#### 4. Political Parties

The latter were peculiarly Diemist: paternally authoritarian, organized as an extension of family power. The pivotal organization was the Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party (Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang), an apparatus devised and controlled by Ngo Dinh Nhu, semi-covert, self-effacing, but with members stationed at all the levers of power within Saigon, and a web of informants everywhere in the country. <sup>42/</sup> Ngu envisaged the Can Lao as the vanguard of Diem's undertakings, and it became in fact the backbone of the regime. Drawing intelligence from agents at all echelons of government in the village, in factories, schools, military units, the Can Lao sought to detect the corrupt or disloyal citizen, and was empowered to bring him to arrest and trial. The Can Lao, unfortunately for Diem's political flexibility, concentrated on disloyalty. Ngo Dinh Nhu, who admitted that the Can Lao closely resembled the communists in organization and technique, used it to stifle all political sentiment competitive or opposed to Ngo Dinh Diem.

The other Diemist party was an open, "mass party," the National Revolutionary Movement (Phong Trao Cach Mang Quoc Gia). <sup>43/</sup> Diem himself was the honorary leader of the Party, and it was the official vehicle for his political movement. The Party claimed to have grown from 10,000 members in 1955 to 1,500,000 in 1959. <sup>44/</sup> In that time it acquired a majority in the National Assembly, and amassed strong voting records for Diem and NRM candidates in elections at all levels. The Party claims to have originated in "clandestine struggle for the revolution of national independence and human emancipation" at the time Diem resigned from Bao Dai's government in 1933, but properly it came into being in October, 1954. The NRM was closely associated with the National Revolutionary Civil Servants League (Lien Doan Cong Chuc Mang Quoc Gia), and since membership in the latter was a concomitant of government employment, the civil service became the core of the NRM. The relationship also established a NRM-League hierarchy parallel to, and in most instances identical with, the government hierarchy down to the village level. Obviously, too, the arrangement equated a party membership with distinct advantages in dealing with the government. NRM strength figures were probably exaggerated, and its active members -- those who attended party functions and political indoctrination sessions -- were those in the League; the NRM was, in effect, a party of government employees or dependents.

Diem did not involve himself directly in the managing of either the Can Lao or the NRM. The former, as mentioned, was always the creature of Nhu. Nhu also controlled the southern branches of the NRM, but in Annam and portions of the Central Highlands the NRM was the tightly held instrument of Ngo Dinh Can. Can brooked no opposition whatsoever; Nhu, more confident in the regions where the Can Lao was most efficient, occasionally permitted some political activity by minority groups, such as the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, and the Socialists. But that activity was tolerated only so long as it was pro-Diem and supporting, rather than opposing, GVN policy.

These were the ideas and the political apparatus by which Ngo Dinh Diem sought to weld together a nation in the aftermath of Geneva. Their narrowness, their inappropriateness for most Cochinchinese and Annamites, virtually assured that the history of his regime, after its initial successes, would become an almost unbroken record of alienation of one portion after another of the Vietnamese body politic. This process of alienation accentuated the failures of the Geneva Settlement, and ultimately led to Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination.

### C. Conflict with the Armed Sects

#### 1. Defeat of the Binh Xuyen

At the time he took office, Diem controlled scarcely a few blocks of Saigon, the capital remaining firmly in the control of Bay Vien and the Binh Xuyen. Beginning in September, 1954, Diem tried to divide and conquer the sects. <sup>45/</sup> Four leaders from each of the religious sects were brought into his cabinet in an effort to isolate the Binh Xuyen, and with U.S. assistance he sought to integrate the sect forces into the national army. He enjoyed some initial success in rallying Cao Dai forces, and confident from assurances of direct American aid, he shut down, in January, 1955, the Binh Xuyen concessions in Saigon and Cholon. In the ensuing confrontation, the Binh Xuyen swung the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao into a United Front of Nationalist Forces, and, although French aid for their forces had formally been withdrawn, continued to draw on French funds and advice. On March 29, 1955, fighting broke in Saigon in which sections of the city were burned. Although a truce was struck, the affair polarized relations between Diem and the sects; between Diem and General Collins, whose advice to conciliate he elected not to follow; and between the Americans and the French, over the viability of Diem. Washington apparently decided at that juncture to temporize with the sects, and to find an alternative to Diem. <sup>46/</sup> Before the instructions could be sent to Saigon, however, fighting was renewed. Even as the battle was joined, Bao Dai telegraphed orders to Diem to travel to France. Diem disobeyed, and, convinced of his moral grounds in attacking the Binh Xuyen, committed his forces to combat. His brother, Nhu, coopted a "Revolutionary Committee" to confer emergency authority on Diem. They were immediately successful, and by mid-May, 1955, the Binh Xuyen had been driven into the Rung Sat swamp east of Saigon, and Bao Dai's power in Saigon was broken. Bay Vien escaped to Paris.



## 2. Victory over the Sects

Diem's forces then ranged out after the other armed factions. Tran Van Soai of the Hoa Hao surrendered, and was given asylum. Another Hoa Hao leader, Ba Cut -- who had cut off a finger to remind himself to fight the French, and had sworn not to cut his hair until Vietnam was reunited -- was captured while negotiating surrender in return for a commission as lieutenant general in the ARVN. 47/ Other leaders were bribed, and the remainder fled or rallied to the GVN. By the end of 1955, Diem appeared to have dealt finally with the challenge of the sects.

It was this apparent success which enabled Diem to survive successfully pressures from an even more powerful set of opponents: those among his Western allies who were determined to replace him. The dimensions of his victory in Vietnam were just becoming evident when in May, 1955, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization convened. There promptly developed a sharp division of view between the French and the Americans. 48/ Bao Dai made known his opposition to Diem, and the French threatened to pull out of Vietnam unless Diem were removed. From Paris, Secretary Dulles reported that the French held that: 49/

"...Time something to be done to avoid civil war. France warned that armed conflict -- first civil war, then guerrilla warfare, then terrorism -- would result if we failed to take action...New Revolutionary Committee...is strongly under Viet Minh influence...There is violent campaign against French and French Expeditionary Corps. Viet Minh agents make good use of it and certain Americans do not seem sufficiently aware of this. French Govt does not wish to have its army act as platform for Viet Minh propaganda. Army will not be maintained in Vietnam at any cost... Continuing with Diem would have three disastrous results:

- (1)...Viet Minh victory
- (2)...focus hostility of everyone on the French, and
- (3)...begin a Franco-U.S. breach..."

The French then proposed to the U.S. that the French Expeditionary Corps be withdrawn, and asked if the U.S. were willing to guarantee French civilians, and the refugees. From Washington, the following instructions to Dulles were returned promptly: 50/

"President's only comment on Vietnam section of (your telegram) was to reiterate position that U.S. could not afford to have forces committed in such undesirable areas as Vietnam. This, of course, is JCS view in past. Am asking Defense and JCS views..."

Asked, the JCS took the position that the question was fundamentally beyond their purview, that neither the ARVN nor the French Expeditionary Corps seemed capable of preserving the integrity of South Vietnam against determined Viet Minh onslaught, and that being debarred from furnishing military forces by the Geneva Agreement, the U.S. was in no position to protect French

nationals. They suggested that Secretary Dulles be advised that: 51/

- "a. The government of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem shows the greatest promise of achieving the internal stability essential for the future security of Vietnam.
- "b. The U.S. could not guarantee the security of the French nationals should the French Expeditionary Corps be withdrawn.
- "c. Possible United States actions under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty could ultimately afford security to Vietnam equal to that provided by the continued presence of the French Expeditionary Corps."

In Paris, Secretary Dulles managed to mollify the French. A key development was a message from Malcolm MacDonald, the British representative in Southeast Asia, urging against Diem's replacement at that time. MacDonald, who was among Diem's severest critics -- he once remarked of Diem that "He's the worst prime minister I have ever seen" -- aligned the British with Dulles, and eventually the French acquiesced in further support of Diem. 52/

The defeat of the sects also opened a domestic political opportunity for Diem. The Popular Revolutionary Committee his brother Nhu had formed during the height of the sect crisis was a "front" of broad political complexion--the membership included prominent nationalists and, as the French had pointed out, two former Viet Minh leaders; it therefore had some substance as what Nhu termed the "democratic revolutionary forces of the nation." 53/ The Revolutionary Committee urged the dissolution of the Bao Dai government, and the organizing of general elections for a National Assembly. Nhu acted under its mandate, setting up a popular referendum in which, on October 23, 1955, an overwhelming vote for Diem in preference to Bao Dai was recorded. The Revolutionary Committee dissolved itself on 31 October, apparently under some pressure from Diem and his brother.

### 3. The Triumph Reappraised

But it is important to note that Diem's military victory over the sects, while impressive, was by no means complete, and was certainly not as decisive as some Americans were led to believe. For example, an NSC report of 1958 mentioned that the Vietnamese Armed Forces were still operating against the sects, and had "succeeded in practically eliminating the Binh Xuyen and Cao Dai forces...." 54/ The Deputy Chief, MAAG, Vietnam, stated in April, 1959, that: "The Binh Xuyen group was completely eliminated as a menace. The Cao Dai group was pacified or reoriented....The Hoa Hao had been reduced to a handful of the diehards...." 55/ These estimates notwithstanding, Binh Xuyen remnants fought off an ARVN force north of Bien Hoa, in 1956, and marauded along the Saigon River north of Saigon in Binh Duong province throughout 1957 and 1958. In 1958, an insurgent force, among whom Binh Xuyen were identified, sacked the Michelin rubber plantation



near Dau Tieng, and in March, 1959, ARVN had a number of encounters with Binh Xuyen elements in the Binh Duong-Bien Hoa area. 56/ There is evidence, though scanty, which indicates that the Binh Xuyen survivors joined with "communist" groups for their depredations; for example, in the 1958 Michelin attack the combined gangster-communist strength was reported to be 300-400. ARVN General Nguyen Chanh Thi, who fought these particular forces, has told of capturing a Binh Xuyen soldier who died under torture without admitting more than that his band had been communicating with communist forces from Tay Ninh province. The general also described capturing in March, 1959, in the same operations, flags identical to that raised in late 1960 by the "National Liberation Front." 57/

In 1956, the Cao Dai Pope, Pham Cong Tac, crossed the frontier of Tay Ninh into Cambodia with a number of his followers, thence to remain in opposition to Diem. 58/ Bay Dom, who had been the deputy of the captured Hoa Hao leader, Ba Cut, also took his forces to the Cambodian border. In 1956, Diem sent Ba Cut, his hair still uncut, to the guillotine. Bay Dom and another Hoa Hao leader, Muoi Tri, then took an oath to avenge Ba Cut, and opened guerrilla warfare against Diem. Some four Hoa Hao battalions are reported to have conducted operations against the GVN continuously through 1962. Muoi Tri in later years openly embraced the Viet Cong cause.

In brief, while Diem's victory over the sects was impressive, it was not wholly conclusive, and the very obduracy and determination which won him early tactical success seemed to impede his inducing the remaining sect dissidents to perform a constructive role in the nation. Rather, his policy invited a Viet Cong-sect alliance against him. That some of the more startling early defeats of Diem's ARVN forces by Viet Cong in 1959 and 1960 occurred in the regions north of Saigon, where lurked Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen remnants, is more than coincidental.

#### D. Rural Pacification

##### 1. Strategy

Americans tended to look at Diem's skein of military and political successes in 1955 with satisfaction, and to regard thereafter Vietnam's internal security with growing complacency. But Ngo Dinh Diem did not. To the contrary, Diem seemed, if anything, over-conscious of the fact that his test with the Viet Minh lay ahead, and that they posed a threat more dangerous than the sects could ever have been, not only because they were politically more pervasive, and not only because they had taught a generation of Vietnamese peasants the techniques of armed conspiracy, but also because their tenets offered competing solutions to the most pressing problems of the Vietnamese people: land and livelihood. Diem's counter is difficult to fault as a broad concept: ARVN forces would reclaim for the GVN regions formerly held by the Viet Minh; political indoctrination teams moving with the troops would carry the message of Diem's revolution to the people; and then a broad follow-up program of Civic Action--political and social development, land reform, and agricultural improvement

would be inaugurated to meet fully the aspirations of the people. That these plans miscarried was due in part to the resistance of the farmers they were intended to benefit, reacting sometimes under Viet Cong leadership, sometimes simply out of peasant conservatism. But a principal portion of the blame for failure must be attributed to Diem's inept, overbearing, or corrupt officials, to Diem's own unremitting anti-communist zeal, and to the failure of both he and his American advisers to appreciate the magnitude of the tasks they set for themselves, or the time required to enact meaningful reform.

## 2. Reoccupying Viet Minh Territory

The first steps were faltering. In early 1955, ARVN units were sent to establish the GVN in the Camau Peninsula in the southernmost part of the country. Poorly led, ill-trained, and heavy-handed, the troops behaved towards the people very much as the Viet Minh had led the farmers to expect. Accompanying GVN propaganda teams were more effective, assailing communism, colonialism, and feudalism--meaning the rule of Francophile Vietnamese, such as Bao Dai's--and distributing pictures of Diem to replace the omnipresent tattered portraits of Ho. 59/ A subsequent operation in Quang Nai and Binh Dinh, Operation Giai Phong, reportedly went off more smoothly. Under ARVN Colonel Le Van Kim, the troops behaved well toward the people, and the propagandists exploited Viet Minh errors to the extent that, as the last Viet Minh soldiers marched down toward their ships, the populace jeered them. American advisers were active, and Diem himself visited this operation a week after the last Viet Minh had left, receiving what the Americans present considered a spontaneous welcome by the peasants. 60/ Nonetheless, the Cau Mau experience became more typical of the ARVN than the Binh Dinh affair. Foreign observers frequently expressed opinion of the ARVN in terms similar to the 1957 view of correspondent David Hotham, who wrote that "far from giving security, there is every reason to suppose that the army, buttressed by the Civil Guard...is regarded by the Southern peasant as a symbol of insecurity and repression." 61/

## 3. Civic Action

Nor were the follow-up Civic Action teams significantly more effective. These were patterned after the GAM's (Groupes Administratifs Mobiles) with which the French had experimented, modified to incorporate U.S.-Filipino experience. In theory, they were to have been drawn from the urban elite, to help the government establish communications with the rural folk. Acting on the doctrine of "Three Withs: eat, sleep, and work with the people" -- some 1400 to 1800 "cadre" undertook: census and surveys of the physical needs of villages; building schools, maternity hospitals, information halls; repairing and enlarging local roads; digging wells and irrigation canals; teaching personal and public hygiene; distributing medicines; teaching children by day, and anti-illiteracy classes by night; forming village militia; conducting political meetings; and publicizing agrarian reform legislation.



Colonel Lansdale described their origins and operations as follows: 62/

"One of the most promising ideas of this period came from Kieu Cong Cung, who was sponsored by Defense Minister Minh. Cung's idea was to place civil service personnel out among the people, in simple dress, where they would help initially by working alongside the people, getting their hands dirty when necessary. The Vietnamese functionaries were aghast, since they cherished their desk work in Saigon and their dignified white-collar authority, and they fought hard within the government machine to kill the idea. It took some months, with the personal intervention and insistence of President Diem, to get a pilot Civic Action program initiated. It was given administrative support by the Ministry of Defense, at first, simply because no other Ministry would help, although it was established as an entity of the Presidency and its policy decisions were made in Cabinet meetings.

"With 80% of the civil service personnel stationed in the national capital, provincial administrators were so under-staffed that few of them could function with even minimum effectiveness. A French colonial administrative system, super-imposed upon the odd Vietnamese imperial system was still the model for government administration. It left many gaps and led to unusually complex bureaucratic practices. There was no uniform legal code, no uniform procedures for the most basic functions of government. The Communists continued their political dominance of many villages, secretly.

"Cung established a training center in Saigon and asked for civil service volunteers, for field duty. With none forthcoming, he then selected a small group of young university-trained men from among the 800,000 refugees from Communist North Vietnam, after security screening. Cung was working on a shoe-string, so his training had added realism in the form of rough living quarters, outdoor classes, and students learning to work with their hands by constructing school facilities. All students had to dress in the "calico noir" of farmers and laborers, which became their "uniform" later in the villages. (Provincial authorities originally refused to recognize Civic Action personnel as government officials, due to the plebian dress; Cung, dressed in the same manner, and as a high functionary close to the President, made a rapid tour of the provinces and gained grudging acceptance of this new style of government employee.)

"Originally, four-man teams were formed; during training, the members of each team were closely observed, to judge compatibility,

with the weak and unwilling being weeded out. After graduation, each team was assigned to a district of a province, with responsibility for a number of villages. When the team finished its work in the first village, it would move to a second village, revisiting the first village periodically to check on local progress. This would continue until all villages in a district were covered, at which time the civic action team directly under the government in the provincial capital would take over district work, now organized and ready for administration.

"When a team entered a village, they would call a village meeting, explain their presence and plans. The following morning, they would set to work to build three community buildings with local materials; if they had been successful in winning over the population, the villagers pitched in and helped. One building was a village hall, for meetings of village officials. Another was a primary school. The third was a combination information hall (news, information about the government, etc.) and dispensary (using the village medical kits developed by ICA). Following up was the building of roads or paths to link the village with provincial roads, if in a remote area, build pit latrines, undertake malaria control, put in drainage, and undertake similar community projects. Villagers were trained to take over these tasks, including primary education and first aid.

"The work of Civic Action teams, at the same grass-roots level as that of Communist workers, proved effective. They became the targets of Communist agents, with political attacks (such as stirring up local Cochinese-Chinese against Tonkinese Civic Action personnel) and then murders. Even while the field work was in its early development stage, President Diem ordered the teams to start working directly with Army commands in pacification campaigns, as the civil government "troops" in what were essentially combat zones. As Civic Action proved itself, it was extended to all provinces south of the 17th Parallel."

Had the cadres been able to confine themselves to these missions, and had the several Saigon ministries, whose field responsibilities they had assumed, been content to have them continue to represent them, matters might have developed differently. As it happened, the cadres became preoccupied with Diem's Anti-Communist campaign, and their operations came under bureaucratic attack from Saigon agencies unwilling to allow the Civic Action teams to carry their programs to the people. Both influences converted the cadre into exclusively propagandistic and political instruments, and drew them away from economic or social activities; in late 1956, Civic Action was cut back severely. In 1957, Kieu Cong Cung died, and Nhu absorbed the remnants into his organization.

#### 4. Land Reform

But the salesmen were less at fault than the product. Diem had to promise much and deliver well to best the Viet Minh in rural reform,



but his promises were moderate, his delivery on them both slow and incomplete. The anarchy prevalent in the countryside during the First Indochina War had benefited the peasant by driving off the French and Vietnamese large landlords. When the Viet Minh "liberated" an area, they distributed these lands free to the farmers, and generally won their allegiance thereby. Columnist Joseph Alsop visited one such Viet Minh controlled region in December, 1954, just before they withdrew their military forces, and reported that: 63/

"It was difficult for me, as it is for any Westerner, to conceive of a Communist government's genuinely 'serving the people.' I could hardly imagine a Communist government that was also a popular government and almost a democratic government. But this was just the sort of government the palm-hut state actually was while the struggle with the French continued. The Viet Minh could not possibly have carried on the resistance for one year, let alone nine years, without the people's strong, untied support."

One of Diem's primary failures lay in his inability similarly to capture loyalties among his 90 percent agricultural people. The core of rural discontent was the large land holdings: in 1954 one quarter of one percent of the population owned forty percent of the rice growing land. 64/ The Diem program to ameliorate this situation for the land-hungry peasants took the form of: (1) resettlement of refugees and others on uncultivated land, begun in 1955; (2) expropriation of all rice land holdings above 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres, and redistribution of these to tenant farmers, a program announced in 1956, but delayed in starting until 1958; and (3) regulation of landlord-tenant relations, effected in 1957, which fixed rents within the range 15-25 percent of crop yield, and guaranteed tenant tenure for 3 to 5 years. 65/ Both the resettlement and redistribution programs guaranteed payments to former owners of the appropriated land; although the land was reasonably priced, and payment allowed over an extended period, the farmers faced payments, and these immediately aroused opposition. Settlers moved into a wilderness, required to clear and irrigate theretofore unused land, could not see why they should pay for their holdings. Tenant farmers were also disaffected, for though rents of 40 percent of crop had been common before the way, many farmers, after eight or so rent-free years, could see no justice in resuming payments to a long absent owner, particularly since the Viet Minh had assured them the land was theirs by right. Nor were many mollified by redistributed land. Land redistribution suffered according to one American expert, from a "lack of serious, interested administrators and top-side command. Government officials, beginning with the Minister for Agrarian Reform, had divided loyalties, being themselves landholders." But even if the goals of the program had been honestly fulfilled -- which they were not -- only 20% of rice land would have passed from large to small farmers. Ultimately only 10% of all tenant farmers benefited. A bolder program, with a maximum holding of 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres, could have put 33 percent of rice land up for transfer. As it happened, however, the redistribution program was not only of limited scope, but slow; by 1958

or 1959, it was virtually inoperative. Bernard Fall has reported that despite Diem's land reforms, 45% of the land remained concentrated in the hands of 2% of landowners, and 75% in the hands of 15%. 66/ Moreover, since the immediate beneficiaries were more often than not Northerners, refugees, and Catholics, the programs acquired an aura of GVN favoritism, and deepened peasant alienation. In time there were also rumors of corruption, with widespread allegations that the Diem family had enriched itself through the manipulation of the land transfers.

As an example of Diem's rural programs in action at the village level which serves to demonstrate how they fell wide of the mark of meeting rural expectations, that of the village communal land is instructive. 67/ After the long period of disrupted public administration during the Franco-Viet Minh War, land records were chaotic. Under Diem, the GVN seized outright nearly half a million acres of land whose title was unclear. Some of this land was rented, the GVN acting as the landlord; some was farmed by ARVN units; and some was converted into communal land and the title passed to village councils. The village councils were then supposed to hold an annual auction of communal land, in which farmers wishing to use certain plots submitted sealed bids. Although this seemed to the casual western observer an equitable system, in actuality it was quite vicious. The bidding farmers were usually seeking to rent land they had been farming free for years. Whether this were the case or not, however, rice growing is a labor intensive process which requires of the farmer a substantial capital investment year by year to build up dikes and ditches. To assure himself that he would not lose this investment, a man farming a plot declared communal land felt compelled to raise his bid each succeeding year to avoid loss of that capital, and to preclude losing his hard work. The consequent competition, however modern, shook the roots of traditional Asian farming communities, for the arrangement had the major disadvantage of creating uncertainty over land from year to year -- the antithesis of security for the rice-growing peasant. To cap these disadvantages, village councils were often less than honest, and tended to be considerably less willing than a paternal landlord to tide the farmer over after a bad crop year; if his subsequent bid were low, he lost his land.

There is another chapter in the history of GVN-farmer relationships which illustrates similar clumsiness. In 1956, as the GVN launched its land reform program, Ngo Dinh Nhu enlisted the aid of the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, which had been organizing tenant farmers in promoting the government's policies through its rural representatives. 68/ The GVN then proceeded to form its own, NRM-connected, Farmers' Associations. The latter, interconnected with province officials and with landowners, actively opposed the union organizers, with the result that many of the latter were jailed. Within a year or two, the union was destroyed for all practical purposes. Few of the NRM Farmers' Associations ever did function on behalf of the farmers; of 288 associations reported in-being by the GVN, a USOM study in 1961 could find only 35 which represented peasant interests in any active sense.



## 5. Village Government

A further example of Diem's maladroitness was his abolishing elections for village councils, a step he took in June, 1956, apparently out of concern that large numbers of former Viet Minh might win office at the village level. 69/ The Vietnamese village had traditionally, even under the French, enjoyed administrative autonomy, and the village council was a coterie of prominent residents who were the government in most simple civic matters, adjudicating disputes, collecting taxes, and managing public funds. Under the national regulation of 1956, members of council and the village chief became appointive officials, and their offices subject to scrutiny by the Diemist apparatus. The results were again a thrusting forward of Northern Catholics, city dwellers, or other non-local trustees of the GVN, to assume control at the key political level of South Vietnam, to handle fiscal matters, and to manage the communal lands. For the same reasons that the villagers had mistrusted the Civic Action cadre, they found the GVN officials strange, and not a little incomprehensible. Also, since these officials were the creatures of the province chiefs, corruption at the province level -- then, as in recent years, not uncommon -- was transmitted directly to the village. Dang Duc Khoi, a young nationalist who rose to become Diem's press officer, and then turned against him, regarded Diem's decision to abolish the village councils his vital error:

"Even if the Viet Minh had won some elections, the danger of doing away with the traditional system of village election was even greater. This was something that was part of the Vietnamese way of life, and the concept should have been retained without interfering with Diem's legitimate desire -- indeed, his need -- for a strong central government. The security problem existed, but it wouldn't have made much difference if the Viet Minh had elected some village chiefs -- they soon established their own underground governments anyway. Diem's mistake was in paralyzing himself. He should have adopted a more intelligent and persuasive policy and concentrated at the outset on obtaining the support of the people. In that way, he could have properly challenged the Viet Minh." 70/

Thus, Ngo Dinh began, in 1956, to place the "security problem" ahead of rural revolution.

## 6. The Anti-Communist Campaign

Indeed, vocal anti-communism became more central to Diem's rural programs than land reform. Like the Can Lao Party, the GVN borrowed heavily from communist technique in combating the Viet Minh and their residual influence -- urged on, in some instances at least, by their American advisers. In the summer of 1955, the government launched an Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign, which included a scheme for classifying the populace into lettered political groups according to attitude toward the Viet Minh, and village ceremonies similar to communist

self-criticism sessions. Viet Minh cadres and sympathizers would appear before the audience to swear their disavowal of communism. The penitents would tell tales of Viet Minh atrocities, and rip or trample a suitable Viet Minh symbol. In February, 1956, tens of thousands of Saigon citizens assembled to witness the "conversion" of 2,000 former Viet Minh cadres. Tran Chanh Tanh, head of the GVN Department of Information and Youth, announced in May, 1956, that the campaign had "entirely destroyed the predominant communist influence of the previous nine years." 71/ According to his figures, 94,041 former communist cadres had rallied to the GVN, 5,613 other cadres had surrendered to government forces, 119,954 weapons had been captured, 75 tons of documents, and 707 underground arms caches had been discovered. One Saigon newspaper boldly referred to Tanh's proceedings as a "puppet show" -- for which it was closed down. What relationship GVN statistics bore to reality is not known. 72/

However, for many peasants the Anti-Communist Campaign was considerably more than theatrics. Diem, in a Presidential Ordinance of January 11, 1956, expanded upon an existing system of political re-education centers for communists and active communist supporters. 73/ The 1956 order authorized the arrest and detention of anyone deemed dangerous to the safety of the state, and their incarceration in one of several concentration camps. The Secretary of State for Information disclosed in 1956 that 15,000 to 20,000 communists had been in these centers since 1954, a figure probably low at the time, and undoubtedly raised thereafter. 74/ On May 6, 1959, the GVN promulgated Law 10/59, which stiffened penalties for communist affiliations, and permitted trial of accused by special military tribunals. That year Anti-Communist Denunciation was also stepped up. In 1960, a GVN Ministry of Information release stated that 48,250 persons had been jailed between 1954 and 1960, but a French observer estimates the numbers in jail at the end of 1956 alone at 50,000. 75/ P. J. Honey, who was invited by Diem to investigate certain of the re-education centers in 1959, reported that on the basis of his talks with former inmates, "the consensus of the opinions expressed by these people is that...the majority of the detainees are neither communists nor pro-communists." 76/

The Anti-Communist Campaigns targetted city-dwellers, but it was in the rural areas, where the Viet Minh had been most strong, that it was applied most energetically. For example, in 1959 the Information Chief of An Xuyen Province (Cau Mau region) reported that a five week Anti-Communist Campaign by the National Revolutionary Movement had resulted in the surrender of 8,125 communist agents, and the denunciation of 9,806 other agents and 29,978 sympathizers. 77/ To furnish the organization and spark enthusiasm for such undertakings, Ngo Dinh Nhu organized in 1958 the Republican Youth, which with Madame Nhu's Solidarity Movement, became a vehicle for rural paramilitary training, political, and intelligence activities. 78/ Nhu saw the Republican Youth as a means for bringing "controlled liberty" to the countryside, and it seems certainly to have assisted in extending his control.



The GVN also tried to reorganize rural society from the family level up on the communist cellular model. Each family was grouped with two to six others into a Mutual Aid Family Group (lien gia), and a like number of lien gia comprised a Khom. 79/ There was an appointed chief for both, serving as a chain of command for the community, empowered to settle petty disputes, and obligated to pass orders and information down from the authorities. Each lien gia was held responsible for the political behavior of its members, and was expected to report suspicious behavior (the presence of strangers, unusual departures, and like events). Each house was required to display on a board outside a listing of the number and sex of its inhabitants. These population control measures were combined with improved systems of provincial police identification cards and fingerprinting. The central government thus became visible--and resented--at the village level as it had never been before in Vietnam.

## 7. Population Relocation

Security and control of the populace also figured in GVN resettlement plans. Even the refugee relief programs had been executed with an eye to national security. Diem visualized a "living wall" of settlers between the lowland populace and the jungle and mountain redoubts of dissidents. 80/ From flying trips, or from military maps, he personally selected the sites for resettlement projects (Khu Dinh Dien) -- often in locales deprived of adequate water or fertile soil -- to which were moved pioneering communities of Northern refugees, or settlers from the overcrowded Annam coast. Between April 1957 and late 1961, one GVN report showed 210,000 persons resettled in 147 centers carved from 220,000 acres of wilderness. Some of the resentments over payments for resettled virgin land were mentioned above. More importantly, however, these "strategic" programs drew a disproportionate share of foreign aid for agriculture; by U.S. estimates, the 2% of total population affected by resettlement received 50% of total aid.

The resettlements precipitated unexpected political reactions from the Montagnard peoples of the Central Vietnam Highlands. The tribes were traditionally hostile to the Vietnamese, and proved to be easily mobilized against the GVN. In 1959 the GVN began to regroup and consolidate the tribes into defensible communities to decrease their vulnerability to anti-government agents, and to ease the applying of cultural uplift programs. By late 1961 these relocations were being executed on a large scale. In Kontum Province, for instance, 35,000 tribesmen were regrouped in autumn 1961, about 50 percent of its total Montagnard population. 81/ Some of the hill people refused to remain in their new communities, but the majority stayed. In the long run, the relocations probably had the effect of focusing Montagnard discontent against the GVN, and facilitating, rather than hindering, the subversion of the tribes. When, in 1964, tribes around Ban Me Thuot rebelled openly against the GVN, they rallied around FULRO, a Montagnard autonomy movement with Viet Cong ties. In the recitation of wrongs and demands that FULRO presented to the GVN, it asserted

that "solutions ~~must~~ be found for the resettlement villages which have infringed upon ~~land~~ of the highland people, and for the highland villages which are surrounded by military camps and consequently do not have enough land to ~~make~~ a living." 82/

But the relocations which catalized the most widespread and dangerous anti-GVN sentiment were those attempted among the South Vietnamese farmers beginning in 1959. In February, 1959, a pilot program of political bifurcation was quietly launched in the areas southwest of Saigon which had been controlled by the Viet-Minh. 83/ Its objective was to resettle peasants out of areas where GVN police or military forces could not operate routinely, into ~~new~~, policed communities of two distinct political colorations. Into one type of these "rural agglomerations," called qui khu, were grouped families with relatives among the Viet Minh or Viet Cong, or suspected of harboring pro-Viet Cong sentiments. Into another type, called qui ap, were grouped GVN-oriented families. Security was the primary reason for selecting the sites of these communities, which meant that in many instances the peasants were forced to move some distance from their land. The French had attempted, on a small scale, such peasant relocations in 1953 in Tonkin; Diem encountered in 1959, as had they, stiff resistance from the farmers over separation from their livelihood and ancestral landhold. But Diem's plan also aroused apprehensions during qui khu designates over the Anti-Communist Campaign. With a rare sensitivity to rural protest, the GVN suspended the program in March, 1959, after only a month.

In July, 1959, however, Diem announced that the GVN was undertaking to ~~improve~~ rural standards of living through establishing some 80 "prosperity and density centers" (khu tru mat). 84/ These "agrovilles" were to be located along a "strategic route system" -- key roads, protected by the new towns. Some 80 agrovilles were to be built by the end of 1963, each designed for 400 families (2,000 to 3,000 people), and each with a surrounding cluster of smaller agrovilles, ap tru mat, for 120 families. The GVN master plan provided for each community defense, schools, dispensary, market center, public garden -- even electricity. The new communities seemed to offer the farmers many advantages, and the GVN expected warm support. But the peasants objected to the agrovilles even more sharply than they had the earlier experiment. The agrovilles were supposed to be constructed by peasants themselves; Corvee labor was resorted to, and thousands of Republican Youth were imported to help. For example, at one site -- Vi Thanh near Can Tho -- 20,000 peasants were assembled from four districts, ~~many~~ more than the number who could expect to profit directly from the undertaking. 85/ Moreover, even most of those who were selected to move into agrovilles they had helped build, did so unwillingly, for it often meant abandoning a cherished ancestral home, tombs, and developed gardens and fields for a strange and desolate place. The settler was expected to tear down his old house to obtain materials for the new, and received GVN aid to the extent of a grant of \$5.50, and an agricultural loan to assist him in paying for his allotted 1.5 acres of land near the agrovillage. Peasant resistance, and then insurgent attacks on the agrovilles, caused abandonment of the program in early 1961, with only 22 out of 80 communities completed. 86/



The agrovillage program was eventually superseded by the GVN strategic hamlet program, formally launched by President Diem in February, 1962, which avoided the mistake of trying to erect whole new communities from the ground up. 87/ Rather, the plan aimed at fortifying existing villages, but did include provisions for destroying indefensible hamlets, and relocation of the inhabitants into more secure communities. The strategic hamlet, ap chien luoc, also eschewed elaborate social or economic development schemes, concentrating on civil defense through crude fortifications and organizing the populace to improve its military capability and political cohesiveness. In some exposed sites, "combat hamlets" were established, with a wholly militarized population. High goals were established, the GVN announcing that by 1963 some 11,000 of the country's 16,000-17,000 hamlets would be fortified. In this instance, as before, the GVN encountered opposition from the peasants, and as before, the insurgents attacked it vigorously. Despite its relative sophistication, the strategic hamlet program, like its predecessors, drove a wedge not between the insurgents and the farmers but between the farmers and the GVN, and eventuated in less rather than more security in the countryside.

## 8. Rural Security Forces

Security was the foremost consideration of the GVN's rural programs, and American aid was lavished on the GVN security apparatus in general. It is surprising, therefore, that the GVN tolerated so ineffective a security apparatus at the village level. The Self-Defense Corps (SDC) and the Civil Guard (CG), charged with rural security, were poorly trained and equipped, miserably led, and incapable of coping with insurgents; they could scarcely defend themselves, much less the peasantry. Indeed, they proved to be an asset to insurgents in two respects: they served as a source of weapons; and their brutality, petty thievery, and disorderliness induced innumerable villagers to join in open revolt against the GVN. 88/ Nor was the ARVN much better, although its conduct improved over the years; in any event, the ARVN seldom was afield, and its interaction with the rural populace through 1959 was relatively slight. It should be noted that the SDC and the CG, the security forces at the disposal of the provincial administration, were often no more venal nor offensive to the peasants than the local officials themselves. Corrupt, arrogant, and overbearing, the men the people knew as the GVN were among the greatest disadvantages of the GVN in its rural efforts.

## E. Urban Political Alienation.

The rigidity of GVN rural political policy was mirrored in the cities: the regime became preoccupied with security to the exclusion of other concerns, with the result that step by step it narrowed its active or potential supporters, aroused increasing fears among its critics, and drove them toward extremism. In a step similar to that he took on village council elections, Diem abolished elections for municipal councils in 1956. 89/ The Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign had its urban counterpart, but communist strength in the French-occupied cities had been less than in the countryside, and threats or imagined challenges to Diem's government were seen as coming from other elements as well. The cities, of course, had

sustained Vietnam's intellectual life, and had been the epi-centers of such political life as the French had permitted the Vietnamese to pursue. Opposition to Diem formed around the old nationalist movements, including the pro-Bao Dai groups Diem labeled "feudalists," around intellectual and individual professional politicians, and eventually around military leaders. Diem's policies successively alienated each.

### 1. "Feudalists"

The Civic Action teams which Diem projected into the former Viet Minh areas in 1955 trumpeted against "Communism, Colonialism, and Feudalism," the last inveighing against Bao Dai, who was, at the time, still Head of state. 90/ "Feudalist" was one epithet applied sweepingly to the religious sects, and to all those whose position or fortune depended upon Bao Dai, from the Binh Xuyen who had purchased its control over Saigon-Cholon from the Emperor, to civil servants and army officers loyal to Bao Dai. The label was virtually as damning as "Communist" in incurring the ungentle attentions of Nhu or Can. In the early years "feudalists" and "communists" were often tarred by the same brush. For example, the Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign got underway in Quang Tri Province in 1955, under Ngo Dinh Can. But Can was also in pursuit of the anti-communist Dai Viet (Great Vietnam) Party there, which had armed units and, for a time, an anti-government radio station. As with the communists, many Dai Viet were killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile. 91/ Diem's defeat of Bao Dai at the polls in October, 1955, strengthened his hand against pro-Bao Dai groups. With the withdrawal of the French the following spring, it became imprudent for any politician or group who wished to avoid Can Lao and NRM scrutiny to maintain ties with "feudalists" in hiding in Vietnam, or operating from abroad. Despite the fact that opposition Vietnamese nationalist parties had been strongly influenced in their organization and methods by the Kuomintang, they had never developed sufficient internal discipline, cohesion or following to admit of challenging Diem after 1956. Such opposition political forces as developed centered around individuals. (Only two non-Diem, non-communist political parties survived the Diem era: the Nationalist Party of Greater Vietnam (Dai Viet Qhoc Dan Dang, the Dai Viet) and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, the VNQDD)). 92/

### 2. Dr. Dan.

Until November, 1960, Diem's most prominent political opponent was Doctor Phan Quang Dan. Dr. Dan was a northern physician who had been caught up in nationalist politics in 1945, and lived in exile after 1947. He returned to Vietnam in September, 1955, to head up a coalition of opposition to the GVN arrangements for the March, 1956, elections for the National Assembly. 93/ He was arrested on the eve of those elections, accused of communist and colonialist activities, and though released, deprived of his position at the University of Saigon Medical School. His subsequent political career underscores the astringent nature of Diem's democracy. In May, 1957 Dr. Dan formed another opposition coalition, the Democratic Bloc, which



acquired a newspaper called Thoi Luan. Thoi Luan became the best-selling newspaper in South Vietnam (all papers were published in Saigon, except Can's government paper in Hue), with a circulation of about 80,000 copies. After a series of statements critical of the GVN, Thoi Luan was sacked by a mob in September, 1957. Unheeding of that warning, the paper continued an opposition editorial policy until March, 1958, when the GVN closed the paper, and gave the editor a stiff fine and a suspended prison sentence for an article including the following passage: 94/

"What about your democratic election?

"During the city-council and village council elections under the 'medieval and colonialist' Nguyen Van Tam Administration [under Bao-Dai, in 1953], constituents were threatened and compelled to vote; but they were still better than your elections, because nobody brought soldiers into Saigon by the truckload 'to help with the voting.'

"What about your presidential regime?

"You are proud for having created for Viet-Nam a regime that you think is similar to that of the United States. If those regimes are similar, then they are as related as a skyscraper is to a tin-roofed shack, in that they both are houses to live in.

"In the U.S.A., Congress is a true parliament and Congressmen are legislators, i.e., free and disinterested men who are not afraid of the government, and who know their duties and dare to carry them out. Here the deputies are political functionaries who make laws like an announcer in a radio station, by reading out loud texts that have been prepared [for them] beforehand...." 95/

A month later, the Democratic Bloc collapsed. Dr. Dan attempted to obtain GVN recognition for another party, the Free Democratic Party, and permission to publish another paper. No GVN action was ever taken on either application, but a number of Dr. Dan's followers in the new party were arrested. When in March, 1959, the newspaper Tin Bac published an article by Dr. Dan, it was closed down. In June, 1959, the newspaper Nguoi Viet Tu Do was similarly indiscreet, and met the same fate. In August, 1959, Dr. Dan ran for a seat in the National Assembly, was elected by a six-to-one margin over Diem's candidate running against him, but was disqualified by court action before he could take his seat. Dr. Dan's career of opposition to Diem ended in November, 1960, when he became the political adviser to the group who attempted a coup d'etat. Dan was arrested and jailed, and remained there until the end of the Diem regime three years later.

### 3. The Caravelle Group, 1960

But Dr. Dan was an exceptionally bold antagonist of Diem. No other politician dared what he did. Even he, however, was unable to bring any unity to the opposition. Such other leaders as there were

distrusted Dan, or feared the GVN. There was, however, one occasion in the spring of 1960 when opposition to Diem did coalesce. There was change in the international political winds that year -- a students' revolt in Korea, an army revolt in Turkey, demonstrations in Japan which resulted in cancellation of President Eisenhower's planned visit. Diem remembered 1960 well, as a "treasure chest for the communists." 95/

"The United States press and the world press started saying that democracy was needed in the under-developed countries. . This came just in time for the communists. Some of the United States press even incited people to rebellion.

"That year was the worst we have ever had...We had problems on all fronts. On the one hand we had to fight the communists. On the other, we had to deal with the foreign press campaign to incite rebellion vis-a-vis Korea. These were sore anxieties, for some unbalanced people here thought it was time to act. Teachers in the private secondary schools began to incite the students to follow the example of the Korean students. And then there were our amateur politicians who were outdated and thought only of taking revenge...."

The last reference was to the Caravelle Group, who issued at the Caravelle Hotel in late April, 1960, a "manifesto" of grievances against the GVN. The eighteen signers were all old-time politicians, leaders of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, the Dai Viet and the VNQDD parties, and dissenting Catholic groups. Eleven had been Cabinet ministers; four had been in other high government positions. They organized themselves as the Bloc for Liberty and Progress, with a platform of constitutional revision toward greater power for the National Assembly against the Presidency. Dr. Dan could not be induced to join the Caravelle Group, but in the Diem cleanup after the November, 1960 coup attempt, the GVN arrested most of the eighteen, and their Bloc disintegrated. The Caravelle Manifesto is reproduced below: 96/

#### MANIFESTO OF THE EIGHTEEN

The President of the Republic of Viet-Nam  
Saigon

Mr. President:

We the undersigned, representing a group of eminent citizens and personalities, intellectuals of all tendencies, and men of good will, recognize in the face of the gravity of the present political situation that we can no longer remain indifferent to the realities of life in our country.

Therefore, we officially address to you today an appeal with the aim of exposing to you the whole truth in the hope that the government will accord it all the attention necessary so as to urgently modify its policies, so as to remedy the present situation and lead the people out of danger.



Let us look toward the past, at the time when you were abroad. For eight or nine years, the Vietnamese people suffered many trials due to the war: They passed from French domination to Japanese occupation, from revolution to resistance, from the nationalist imposture behind which hid communism to a pseudo-independence covering up for colonialism; from terror to terror, from sacrifice to sacrifice -- in short, from promise to promise, until finally hope ended in bitter disillusion.

Thus, when you were on the point of returning to the country, the people as a whole entertained the hope that it would find again under your guidance the peace that is necessary to give meaning to existence, to reconstruct the destroyed homes, put to the plow again the abandoned lands. The people hoped no longer to be compelled to pay homage to one regime in the morning and to another at night, not to be the prey of the cruelties and oppression of one faction; no longer to be treated as coolies; no longer to be at the mercy of the monopolies; no longer to have to endure the depredations of corrupt and despotic civil servants. In one word, the people hoped to live in security at last, under a regime which would give them a little bit of justice and liberty. The whole people thought that you would be the man of the situation and that you would implement its hopes.

That is the way it was when you returned. The Geneva Accords of 1954 put an end to combat and to the devastations of war. The French Expeditionary Corps was progressively withdrawn, and total independence of South Viet Nam had become a reality. Furthermore, the country had benefited from moral encouragement and a substantial increase of foreign aid from the free world. With so many favorable political factors, in addition to the blessed geographic conditions of a fertile and rich soil yielding agricultural, forestry, and fishing surpluses, South Viet Nam should have been able to begin a definitive victory in the historical competition with the North, so as to carry out the will of the people and to lead the country on the way to hope, liberty, and happiness. Today, six years later, having benefited from so many undeniable advantages, what has the government been able to do? Where has it led South Viet Nam? What parts of the popular aspirations have been implemented?

Let us try to draw an objective balance of the situation, without flattery or false accusations, strictly following a constructive line which you yourself have so often indicated, in the hope that the government shall modify its policies so as to extricate itself from a situation that is extremely dangerous to the very existence of the nation.

## Policies

In spite of the fact that the bastard regime created and protected by colonialism has been overthrown and that many of the feudal organizations of factions and parties which oppress the population were destroyed, the people do not know a better life or more freedom under the republican regime which you have created. A constitution has been established in form only; a National Assembly exists whose deliberations always fall into line with the government; antidemocratic elections -- all those are methods and "comedies" copied from the dictatorial Communist regimes, which obviously cannot serve as terms of comparison with North Viet Nam.

Continuous arrests fill the jails and prisons to the rafters, as at this precise moment; public opinion and the press are reduced to silence. The same applies to the popular will as translated in certain open elections, in which it is insulted and trampled (as was the case, for example, during the recent elections for the Second Legislature). All these have provoked the discouragement and resentment of the people.

Political parties and religious sects have been eliminated. "Groups" or "movements" have replaced them. But this substitution has only brought about new oppressions against the population without protecting it for that matter against Communist enterprises. Here is one example: the fiefs of religious sects, which hitherto were deadly for the Communists, now not only provide no security whatever but have become favored highways for Viet Minh guerrillas, as is, by the way, the case of the rest of the country.

This is proof that the religious sects, though futile, nevertheless constitute effective anti-Communist elements. Their elimination has opened the way to the Viet Cong and unintentionally has prepared the way for the enemy, whereas a more realistic and more flexible policy could have amalgamated them all with a view to reinforcing the anti-Communist front.

Today the people want freedom. You should, Mr. President, liberalize the regime, promote democracy, guarantee minimum civil rights, recognize the opposition so as to permit the citizens to express themselves without fear, thus removing grievances and resentments, opposition to which now constitutes for the people their sole reason for existence. When



this occurs, the people of South Viet Nam, in comparing their position with that of the North, will appreciate the value of true liberty and of authentic democracy. It is only at that time that the people will make all the necessary efforts and sacrifices to defend that liberty and democracy.

### Administration

The size of the territory has shrunk, but the number of civil servants has increased, and still the work doesn't get done. This is because the government, like the Communists, lets the political parties control the population, separate the elite from the lower echelons, and sow distrust between those individuals who are "affiliated with the movement" and those who are "outside the group." Effective power, no longer in the hands of those who are usually responsible, is concentrated in fact in the hands of an irresponsible member of the "family," from whom emanates all orders; this slows down the administrative machinery, paralyzes all initiative, discourages good will. At the same time, not a month goes by without the press being full of stories about graft impossible to hide; this becomes an endless parade of illegal transactions involving millions of piastres.

The administrative machinery, already slowed down, is about to become completely paralyzed. It is in urgent need of reorganization. Competent people should be put back in the proper jobs; discipline must be re-established from the top to the bottom of the hierarchy; authority must go hand in hand with responsibility; efficiency, initiative, honesty, and the economy should be the criteria for promotion; professional qualifications should be respected. Favoritism based on family or party connections should be banished; the selling of influence, corruption and abuse of power must be punished.

Thus, everything still can be saved, human dignity can be re-established; faith in an honest and just government can be restored.

### Army

The French Expeditionary Corps has left the country, and a republican army has been constituted, thanks to American aid, which has equipped it with modern materiel. Nevertheless, even in a group of the proud elite of the youth such as the Vietnamese Army -- where the sense of honor should be cultivated, whose blood and arms should be devoted to the defense of the

country, where there should be no place for clannishness and factions -- the spirit of the "national revolutionary movement" or of the "personalist body" divides the men of one and the same unit, sows distrust between friends of the same rank, and uses as a criterion for promotion fidelity toward the party in blind submission to its leaders. This creates extremely dangerous situations, such as the recent incident of Tay-Ninh.\*

The purpose of the army, pillar of the defense of the country, is to stop foreign invasions and to eliminate rebel movements. It is at the service of the country only and should not lend itself to the exploitation of any faction or party. Its total reorganization is necessary. Clannishness and party obedience should be eliminated; its moral base strengthened; a noble tradition of national pride created; and fighting spirit, professional conscience, and bravery should become criteria for promotion. The troops should be encouraged to respect their officers, and the officers should be encouraged to love their men. Distrust, jealousy, rancor among colleagues of the same rank should be eliminated.

Then in case of danger, the nation will have at its disposal a valiant army animated by a single spirit and a single aspiration: to defend the most precious possession -- our country, Viet Nam.

#### Economic and Social Affairs

A rich and fertile country enjoying food surpluses; a budget which does not have to face military expenditures,\*\* important war reparations; substantial profits from Treasury bonds; a colossal foreign-aid program; a developing market capable of receiving foreign capital investments -- those are the many favorable conditions which could make Viet Nam a productive and prosperous nation. However, at the present time many people are out of work, have no roof over their heads, and no money. Rice is abundant but does not sell; shop windows are well-stocked but the goods do not move. Sources of revenue are in the hands of speculators -- who use the [government] party and group to mask monopolies

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\* This refers to the penetration of the compound of the 32d ARVN Regiment in January, 1960, when communist forces killed 23 soldiers and captured hundreds of weapons.

\*\* The military expenditures of the Vietnamese budget are paid out of U.S. economic and military aid.



operating for certain private interests. At the same time, thousands of persons are mobilized for exhausting work, compelled to leave their own jobs, homes and families, to participate in the construction of magnificent but useless "agrovilles" which weary them and provoke their disaffection, thus aggravating popular resentment and creating an ideal terrain for enemy propaganda.

The economy is the very foundation of society, and public opinion ensures the survival of the regime. The government must destroy all the obstacles standing in the way of economic development; must abolish all forms of monopoly and speculation; must create a favorable environment for investments coming from foreign friends as well as from our own citizens; must encourage commercial enterprises, develop industry, and create jobs to reduce unemployment. At the same time, it should put an end to all forms of human exploitation in the work camps of the agrovilles.

Then only the economy will flourish again; the citizen will find again a peaceful life and will enjoy his condition; society will be reconstructed in an atmosphere of freedom and democracy.

Mr. President, this is perhaps the first time that you have heard such severe and disagreeable criticism -- so contrary to your own desires. Nevertheless, sir, these words are strictly the truth, a truth that is bitter and hard, that you have never been able to know because, whether this is intended or not, a void has been created around you, and by the very fact of your high position, no one permits you to perceive the critical point at which truth shall burst forth in irresistible waves of hatred on the part of a people subjected for a long time to terrible suffering and a people who shall rise to break the bonds which hold it down. It shall sweep away the ignominy and all the injustices which surround and oppress it.

As we do not wish, in all sincerity, that our Fatherland should have to live through these perilous days, we -- without taking into consideration the consequences which our attitude may bring upon us -- are ringing today the alarm bell in view of the imminent danger which threatens the government.

Until now, we have kept silent and preferred to let the Executive act as it wished. But now time is of the essence;

we feel that it is our duty -- and in the case of a nation in turmoil even the most humble people have their share of responsibility -- to speak the truth, to awaken public opinion, to alert the people, and to unify the opposition so as to point the way. We beseech the government to urgently modify its policies so as to remedy the situation, to defend the republican regime, and to safeguard the existence of the nation. We hold firm hope that the Vietnamese people shall know a brilliant future in which it will enjoy peace and prosperity in freedom and progress.

Yours respectfully,

1. TRAN VAN VAN, Diploma of Higher Commercial Studies, former Minister of Economy and Planning
2. PHAN KHAC SUU, Agricultural Engineer, former Minister of Agriculture, former Minister of Labor
3. TRAN VAN HUONG, Professor of Secondary Education, former Prefect of Saigon-Cholon
4. NGUYEN LUU VIEN, M.D., former Professor at the Medical School, former High Commissioner of Refugees
5. HUYNH-KIM HUU, M.D., former Minister of Public Health
6. PHAN HUY QUAT, M.D., former Minister of National Education, former Minister of Defense
7. TRAN VAN LY, former Governor of Central Viet-Nam
8. NGUYEN TIEN HY, M.D.
9. TRAN VAN DO, M.D., former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of Vietnamese Delegation to the 1954 Geneva Conference
10. LE NGOC CHAN, Attorney at Law, former Secretary of State for National Defense
11. LE QUANG LUAT, Attorney at Law, former Government Delegate for North Viet-Nam, former Minister of Information and Propaganda
12. LUONG TRONG TUONG, Public Works Engineer, former Secretary of State for National Economy



13. NGUYEN TANG NGUYEN, M.D., former Minister of Labor and Youth
14. PHAM HUU CHUONG, M.D., former Minister of Public Health and Social Action
15. TRAN VAN TUYEN, Attorney at Law, former Secretary of State for Information and Propaganda
16. TA CHUONG PHUNG, former Provincial Governor for Binh-Dinh
17. TRAN LE CHAT, Laureate of the Triennial Mandarin Competition of 1903
18. HO VAN VUI, Reverend, former Parish Priest of Saigon, at present Parish Priest of Tha-Ia, Province of Tay-Ninh

The November, 1960, coup marked the end of opposition by professional politicians against Diem. In fact, all the Caravelle group were arrested and jailed. Such political activity among them as occurred in 1962 and 1963 was perforce subdued to the point that it captured attention neither from opponents of Diem, nor Diem himself. But 1960 was altogether too late for effective "loyal opposition" to form. By that time the GVN's ability to control the press, to manage demonstrations, to limit travel, and to imprison (and worse) at will, had virtually paralyzed the intellectual elite of Vietnam. Nor were labor unions politically active, despite their power potential. As early as 1956 the GVN had become alarmed over Communist influence in rubber workers' unions in Binh Duong Province, and had arrested union leaders. Farmers' unions were crippled by arrests of union cadre, and the Can Lao proved itself quite capable of engineering elections within the unions as effectively as it rigged those for the National Assembly. 97/ The threat to Diem, when it came, arose from more traditional sources of power -- the religious sects and the armed forces.

#### 4. Religious Dissenters

Diem's clash with the armed sects in 1954 and 1955 had the unfortunate political consequence of casting his regime in religious overtones which deepened as the Ngo Dinh Catholicism became more widely known. Together with Diem's obvious U.S. backing, these had the effect of accentuating his Occidental, and especially American, identity. The British Catholic writer and commentator on Vietnam, Graham Greene, observed in 1955 that:

"It is Catholicism which has helped to ruin the government of Mr. Diem, for his genuine piety has been exploited by his American advisers until the Church is in danger of sharing the unpopularity of the United States. An unfortunate visit by

Cardinal Spellman...has been followed by those of Cardinal Gillroy and the Archbishop of Canberra. Great sums are spent on organized demonstrations for visitors, and an impression is given that the Catholic Church is occidental and an ally of the United States is the cold war....

"In the whole of Vietnam the proportion of Catholics to the population is roughly the same as in England--one in ten, a ratio insufficient to justify a Catholic government. Mr. Diem's ministers are not all Catholic, but Mr. Diem, justifiably suspicious of many of his supporters, has confined the actual government to himself and members of his family. He undertakes personally the granting of exit and entry visas....The south, instead of confronting the totalitarian north with evidences of freedom, had slipped into an inefficient dictatorship: newspapers suppressed, strict censorship, men exiled by administrative order and not by judgment of the courts. It is unfortunate that a government of this kind should be identified with one faith. Mr. Diem may well leave his tolerant country a legacy of anti-Catholicism...." 98/

While Vietnam has an ample record of religious intolerance--especially intolerance for Catholics--calling into question Mr. Greene's contrary characterization, his prediction of Diem's impact proved correct. Open opposition to his government by civilians finally manifested itself on the issue of "religious freedom" in Hue and Siagon in 1963, coalescing around militant Buddhists and students--two groups that were, theretofore, for all practical purposes politically mute. 99/ There is no doubt, however, that Diem's Catholicism from 1954 on acted to his disadvantage among the non-Catholic masses, and enhanced the My-Diem image of his government's being an instrument of alien power and purpose.

#### F. Tensions With the Armed Forces.

The soldiers of Vietnam presented Diem with his first, and his last political challenges. Part of the Army's political involvement stemmed from patent military inefficiency in Diem's tight control, for which RVNAF leaders correctly held Diem responsible. Part also correctly can be attributed to vaulting ambition and venality among certain of Diem's officers. And since the United States paid, schooled, and advised the RVNAF, it would also be correct to consider the U.S. involved, if not responsible. The record of Diem's relations with RVNAF, like his relations with other parts of Vietnamese society, is a history of increasing tensions, and of lowering mutual understanding and support.

##### 1. Clashes with Francophiles, 1954-1955

Diem's first interactions with his army were inauspicious. From September to November, 1954, Army Chief of Staff General Nguyen Van Hinh--a French citizen who held a commission in the French Air Force--



seemed on the verge of overthrowing Diem. Diem ordered Hinh out of the country; Hinh defied him. An apparent coup d'etat in late October was blocked by adroit maneuvering by Colonel Lansdale, and by assurance from General Collins to Hinh that American support would be promptly withdrawn from Vietnam were his plot to succeed. As Hinh recalled it:

"I had only to lift my telephone and the coup d'etat would have been over....Nothing could have opposed the army. But the Americans let me know that if that happened, dollar help would be cut off. That would not matter to the military. If necessary, we soldiers could go barefoot and eat rice but the country cannot survive without American help." 100/

Diem removed Hinh on 29 November 1954. The Acting Chief of Staff, General Nguyen Van Vy, Diem found "insufficiently submissive," and replaced him on 12 December 1954 with General Le Van Ty, kicking Vy upstairs to be Inspector General. 101/ In April 1955, during the turmoil of the sect rebellion, Bao Dai attempted to appoint Vy as Chief of Staff with full military powers, and to recall Diem to France. As Diem committed his army to battle with the sects, Vy announced that, in the name of Bao Dai, and with the backing of all but ten percent of the Army, he had assumed control of the government. However, General Ty, Diem's Chief of Staff, remained loyal, rallied key local commanders around Diem, and Vy fled. Within weeks both Generals Hinh and Vy were afield against Diem in the Mekong Delta, maneuvering a disparate army of Hoa Hao, French "deserters," and others -- Diem's forces again beat them, and both then went into exile. 102/

## 2. Militarizing Public Administration

What Diem remembered from these experiences was that personal loyalty was the prime requisite for high command. As a result, he took an intense and direct interest in the appointments of military officers, and -- as in other endeavors -- found it easier to place his trust in Northerners and Catholics. Before long, the upper echelons of the officer corps were preponderantly from these groups, and closely netted to the Diem family web of preferment. As GVN demands for loyal civil servants willing to forego the advantages of Saigon multiplied, Diem was impelled to shift trusted military officers into his civil administration. The head of the General Directorate of Police and Security was a military officer from 1956 forward; his subordinates in the police apparatus included a growing number of military officers--for example, all the Saigon district police chiefs appointed in the year 1960 were soldiers. 103/ The government in the provinces reflected similar moves toward militarization: 104/

### Trends Toward Military Officers as Province Chiefs

	<u>No. Provinces</u>	<u>No. Military Chiefs</u>	<u>% Military Chiefs</u>
1958	36	13	36
1960	36	21	58
1962	41	36	88

There was a coextensive militarization of public administration at district and lower levels.

### 3. Dissatisfaction in the Officer Corps

But if Vietnam's soldiers found the Diem family a way to political power, wealth, and social prominence, they had ample reason to be dissatisfied with Diem's intervention in their professional concerns. The propensity of Ngo Dinh Diem to control his military with a tight rein extended to deciding when and where operations would be conducted, with what forces, and often how they would be used. Moreover, he involved himself with the arming and equipping of the forces, showing a distinct proclivity to heavy military forces of the conventional type, even for the Civil Guard, which reinforced American military leanings in the same direction. 105/ There were a few soldiers, like General Duong Van Minh, who sharply disagreed with the President on both points. And there was a growing number of young officers who resented the Catholic-Northern dominant clique within the military, who were dissatisfied with Diem's familial interference in military matters, and who were willing to entertain notions that the GVN had to be substantially modified. Nonetheless, until 1963, there was little apparent willingness to concert action against Diem.

### 4. The Early Coup Attempts, 1960 and 1962

On November 11, 1960, three paratroop battalions stationed in Saigon -- considered by Diem among his most faithful -- cooperated in an attempted coup d'etat. The leadership consisted of a small group of civilians and military officers: Hoang Co Thuy, a Saigon lawyer; Lt Colonel Nguyen Trieu Hong, Thuy's nephew; Lt Colonel Vuong Van Dong, Hong's brother in law; and Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, the commander of the paratroops, who was apparently brought into the cabal at the last moment. The coup failed to arouse significant general pro-coup sentiment, either among the armed forces, or among the populace. Troops marched on Saigon, and rebels surrendered. 106/ In February, 1962, two Vietnamese air force planes bombed the Presidential palace in an unsuccessful attempt on President Diem and the Nhut -- properly, an assassination attempt rather than a coup d'etat. 107/

But the abortive events of 1960 and 1962 had the effect of dramatizing the choices open to those who recognized the insolvency of Diem's political and military policies. When Diem was overthrown in November, 1963, he was attacked by an apparatus that had been months in planning, originating in a plot by three generals, Duong Van Minh, Tran



Van Don, and Le Van Kim. 108/ Unlike the earlier incident, the 1963 coup was actively supported by virtually all the generals of RVNAF, and was openly condoned by large sectors of the populace.

## G. The Viet Cong

### 1. Diem and Communists

Ngo Dinh Diem presided over a state which, for all the lip service it paid to individual freedom and American style government, remained a one party, highly centralized familial oligarchy in which neither operating democracy, nor the prerequisites for such existed. On 11 January, 1956, in GVN Ordinance Number 6, President Diem decreed broad governmental measures providing for "the defense of the state and public order," including authority to detain "individuals considered a danger to the state" or to "national defense and common security" at re-education centers." 109/ One month after the date of the scheduled Geneva plebescite, on 21 August 1956, the Government of Vietnam proclaimed Ordinance Number 47, which defined as a breach of law punishable by death any deed performed in or for any organization designated as "Communist." 110/ Moreover, the GVN was forced to use violence to establish itself in its own rural areas. In July, 1956, the month the Geneva elections were scheduled to have been held, the U.S. Army attache in Saigon noted in his monthly report that:

"Orders have reportedly been issued to all Viet Minh cadres in Free Viet Nam to increase their efforts to reorganize and revitalize the military units in their zones of responsibility. These cadres have, however, encountered considerable difficulty in motivating their adherents to work for the Communist cause. The military and political cadres are making little progress due to the Communist Denunciation Campaigns promoted by the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam...." 111/

The same report submitted an ARVN estimate of 4,300 armed Viet Minh in all of Free Viet Nam, and recorded small ARVN skirmishes with Viet Minh south of Saigon, clashes with 10 Hoa Hao battalions, 8 Cao Dai battalions north and west of Saigon, and incidents of banditry north of Bien Hoa by Binh Xuyen. But, in a relatively short time, the fighting subsided, the Vietnamese Army was withdrawn from the countryside for retraining, reorganization, and modernization under the US MAAG, and South Vietnam ostensibly settled into the first peace it had known in a decade. Peace rested, however, on a strong central government. In an article published in the January, 1957, Foreign Affairs, an American analyst stated that:

"South Viet Nam is today a quasi-police state characterized by arbitrary arrests and imprisonment, strict censorship of the press and the absence of an effective political opposition.... All the techniques of political and psychological warfare, as well as pacification campaigns involving extensive military operations have been brought to bear against the underground." 112/

Police states, efficiently organized and operated, have historically demonstrated much greater ability at countering insurgency than other sorts of governments. South Vietnam in fact succeeded in 1955 and 1956 in quelling rural dissidence through a comprehensive political and military assault on sect forces and other anti-government armed bands using its army, the civic action cadre, the Communist Denunciation campaign, and a broad range of promised reforms. Moreover, at its worst, the Government of South Vietnam compared favorably with other Asian regimes with respect to its degree of repressiveness. Nor did it face endemic violence markedly different from that then prevalent in Burma, Indonesia, South Korea. And its early "counterinsurgency" operations were as sophisticated as any being attempted elsewhere in Asia. In 1957, the Government of Viet Nam claimed that its pacification programs had succeeded:

"We believe that with clear, even elementary ideas based upon facts...we can imbue...first the youth and ultimately the entire population with the spirit and essential objectives of...civic humanism. We believe that this above all is the most effective antidote to Communism (which is but an accident of history)....

"...We can see that the Viet-Minh authorities have disintegrated and been rendered powerless." 113/

P. J. Honey, the British expert on Vietnam, agreed; his evaluation as of early 1958 was as follows:

"...The country has enjoyed three years of relative peace and calm in which it has been able to carry on the very necessary work of national reconstruction. The most destructive feature in the national life of Vietnam throughout recent years has been the lack of security in the countryside, which obliged farmers and peasants to abandon the ricefields and to flee to the large cities for safety. Today it is possible to travel all over South Vietnam without any risk. The army and security forces have mopped up most of the armed bands of political opponents of the Government, of Communists and of common bandits. One still hears of an isolated raid, but the old insecurity is fast vanishing...." 114/

After a 1959 trip, however, Honey detected dangerous unease in the countryside:

"For the overwhelming majority of the Vietnamese, heirs to experience of a century of French colonial rule, the Government is a remote body which passes laws, collects taxes, demands labour corvées, takes away able-bodied men for military service, and generally enriches itself at the expense of the poor peasant. 'Government' is associated in the minds of the villagers with exactions, punishments, unpaid labour, and other unpleasant matters. These people are members of families and members of villages, and their loyalties to both are strong. But these loyalties do not extend beyond the village, nor has any past experience taught the



peasants why they should. The idea that the peasants should assume any responsibility for the [extra-village] government themselves would be so alien to their thinking as to be comic. Educated Vietnamese are well aware of this, as many of their actions show....

"Such political parties as existed in Vietnam before the advent of independence were all clandestine, so that any political experience acquired from these by the Vietnamese peasants will have been of secret plotting for the overthrow of the Government. Since independence, they will probably have been subjected to attempted Communist indoctrination by the Viet Cong, but this too will have had an anti-Government slant. Since 1954, the peasants have been fed on a diet of puerile, and frequently offensive slogans by the Ministry of Information. These serve, if indeed they serve any purpose at all, to make the peasant distrust the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem. The peasants, for all their naiveté, are far from foolish and they are not deceived by slogans alleging to be true things which they know, from their own personal experience, to be untrue. Any political experience among the peasantry, then, is more likely to prove a liability than an asset to any Government." 115/

Diem knew that his main political dissent was centered not among his fellow mandarins, in his press, or among his military officers, but in the peasantry. And the prime challenge was, as Diem saw it, communism, precisely because it could and did afford the peasants political experience.

Communism was, from the outset of Diem's rule, his bete noire. In 1955, after the victory over the sects, and just before General John W. O'Daniel ended his tour as Chief, MAAG Vietnam, Diem talked to the General about Vietnam's future:

"He spoke about the decentralization of government that he had been advised to undertake, but felt that the time was not yet right. He felt that, since his country was involved in a war, warlike control was in order. He remarked that the Vietminh propaganda line never mentioned Communism, but only land reform....Diem wants land reform too...." 116/

In his message to the American Friends of Vietnam in June, 1956, Diem acknowledged progress, but warned that:

"We have arrived at a critical point....We must now give meaning to our hard sought liberty....To attain that goal we need technicians and machines. Our armed forces which are considerably reduced must however undertake an immense task from the military as well as the cultural and social point of view. It is indispensable that our Army have the wherewithal to become increasingly capable of preserving the peace which we seek. There are an infinite number of tasks in all fields to complete before the year's end. Economic aid can be only effective once security has been restored...." 117/

Diem's preoccupation with security paradoxically interfered with his ability to compete with the communists in the countryside. In effect, he decided on a strategy of postponing the politicizing of the peasants until he had expunged his arch-foes. Diem's official biography underscores this point:

"The main concern of President Ngo Dinh Diem is therefore to destroy the sources of demoralization, however powerful, before getting down to the problem of endowing Vietnam with a democratic apparatus in the Western sense of the word." 118/

Madame Nhu, his sister-in-law, was vehement that any political liberalization would have operated to Viet Cong advantage: "If we open the window, not only sunlight, but many bad things will fly in, also." 119/ To hold a contrary view does not necessarily argue that democratization was the only way Diem could have met his political opposition in the villages; it does seem, however, that in failing to meet aspirations there by some departure from the inefficiently repressive course he adopted, Diem erred. In concluding that he did not have to reckon with peasant attitudes, Diem evidently operated from two related misapprehensions: that somehow the peasants would remain politically neutral while he eliminated the communists, and that the Viet Cong were essentially a destructive force. 120/ It was not that Diem could not vocalize a sound estimate of the communist political threat; his own description of communist operations to an Australian journalist was quite accurate:

"In China, during the Indo-China war and now here, the Communists have always sheltered in open base areas of difficult access, in areas where there are no roads. They have made their headquarters in the jungle. Cautiously, sometimes only one man at a time, they move into a village and establish a contact, then a cell until the village is theirs to command. Having got one village, they move to a second village and from a second to third, until eventually they need not live in any of these villages, but merely visit them periodically. When this stage is reached, they are in a position to build training camps and even start crude factories and produce home-made guns, grenades, mines, and booby traps.

"This is all part of the first phase. The second phase is to expand control and link up with Communist groups in other bases. To begin with, they start acts of violence through their underground organizations. They kill village chiefs, headmen, and others working for the government and, by so doing, terrorize the population, not necessarily by acts of violence against the people but by demonstrating that there is no security for them in accepting leadership from those acknowledging the leadership of the government. Even with much smaller numbers of troops than the constituted authority, it is not difficult now for the Communists to seize the initiative. A government has responsibility for maintaining supply to the civil population, of keeping roads,



railways, rivers, and canals open for traffic, of ensuring that rural crops reach the markets and that in turn commodity goods are distributed throughout the country. The Communists have no such responsibility. They have no roads and bridges to guard, and no goods to distribute." 121/

Diem failed to perceive that the "first phase" was crucial, or that the VC were, from the very outset, constructing while they destroyed, building a state within South Vietnam with more effective local government than his own.

Like many another issue in Vietnam, the problem was in part semantics. "Communists" during this period formally recanted for the GVN by the thousands; thousands more "communists" were incarcerated by the GVN for "political reeducation." But Ordinance 47 of 1956 notwithstanding, "communist" is a term which has not been used since the 1940's by Vietnamese serving the Marxist-Lenist Party headed by Ho Chi Minh of the DRV. These referred to themselves as members of the Vietnam Workers Party (Dang Lao Dong), as members of one Front or another, or as resistance fighters, or fighters for national liberation. Nor was "Viet Minh" a useful name, since Viet Minh, a nationalist front, included numerous non-communist, or at least non-party members. In 1956, the Saigon press began to distinguish between the Viet Minh and communists by referring to the latter as "Viet Cong," a fairly precise, and not necessarily disparaging, rendition of "Viet Nam Cong-San," which means "Vietnamese Communist." 122/ The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) much later condemned the term as "contemptuous," and pointed out that the GVN had applied it indiscriminately to all persons or groups "who are lukewarm toward the pro-U.S. policy even on details." 123/ There can be no doubt that Diem and his government applied the term somewhat loosely within South Vietnam, and meant by it North as well as South Vietnamese communists, whom they presumed acted in concert. 124/

## 2. The Viet Minh Residue

At the close of the Franco-Viet Minh War, some 60,000 men were serving in organized Viet Minh units in South Viet Nam. For the regroupments to North Vietnam, these units were augmented with large numbers of untrained young men -- who were later known among the regroupees in North Vietnam as "soldiers of Geneva." A reported 90,000 soldiers were taken to North Vietnam in the evacuated units, while the U.S. and the GVN estimated that 5,000 to 10,000 trained men were left behind as "cadre." If French estimates are correct that in 1954 the Viet Minh controlled over 60 to 90 percent of South Vietnam's villages outside the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao regions, those 5000 to 10,000 cadre must have represented only a small fraction of the remaining Viet Minh apparatus--cadre, local workers, sympathizers--in the countryside. GVN figures themselves attest to this. In 1955 and 1956 alone, the GVN claimed 100,000 communist "cadre" rallied or surrendered, and up to 20,000 "communists and communist sympathizers" were detained for reeducation. However, from all accounts--including testimony of the communist prey--the combination of the evacuation and the GVN Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign was devastating. The Viet Minh wartime apparatus was depleted and fragmented, as the GVN claimed.

Neither Diem's GVN nor the U.S. knew a great deal about the Viet Minh in the period 1954-1960. By 1967, however, new information had begun to accumulate from interrogations of prisoners and defectors, and captured documents. For example, in March, 1967, a study was published of 23 Viet Minh who stayed behind during the regroupment of 1954-1955. 126/ All the men of the sample told consistent stories, and although an admittedly narrow basis for generalization, the stories ring true. Upon departure, the Viet Minh leaders assigned some of these stay-behinds active roles; others were simply told to return to their homes as inactives, and wait for further instructions. It is quite clear that even the activists were not instructed to organize units for guerrilla war, but rather to agitate politically for the promised Geneva elections, and the normalization of relations with the North. They drew much reassurance from the presence of the ICC, and up until mid-1956, most held on to the belief that the elections would take place. They were disappointed in two respects: not only were the promised elections not held, but the amnesty which had been assured by the Geneva Settlement was denied them, and they were hounded by the Anti-Communist campaign. After 1956, for the most part, they went "underground." They were uniformly outraged at Diem's practices, particularly the recurrent GVN attempts to grade the populace into lettered categories according to previous associations with the Viet Minh. Most of them spoke of terror, brutality and torture by GVN rural officials in carrying out the Communist Denunciation campaigns, and of the arrest and slaying of thousands of old comrades from the "resistance." Their venom was expended on these local officials, rather than on Diem, or the central government, although they were prepared to hold Diem ultimately responsible. A veteran who had been a Party member since 1936 characterized the years 1955-1959 as the most difficult years of the entire revolution.

What these cadre did in those years is revealing. Only four of the 23 were engaged in military tasks. Most spent their time in preparation for a future uprising, in careful recruitment in the villages -- concentrating on the very families with Viet Minh ties who were receiving priority in the GVN's attentions -- and in constructing base areas in the mountains or jungles. The Viet Minh activists sought out the inactives, brought them back into the organization, and together they formed the framework of an expanding and increasingly intricate network of intelligence and propaganda. Few spoke of carrying weapons, or using violence before 1959, although many boasted of feats of arms in later years. They felt that they lacked the right conditions to strike militarily before 1959; their mission was preparation. In several instances, the Viet Cong used terror to recruit former Viet Minh for the new movement, threatening them with "treason" and elimination; caught between the GVN and the VC, many old Resistance members joined the "New Resistance." But most spoke of making person-to-person persuasion to bring in new members for the movement, relying mainly on two appeals: nationalism and social justice. They stressed that the Americans had merely substituted a new, more pernicious form of tyranny for that of the French, and that the My-Diem combine was the antithesis of humane and honest government. One respondent summed up this activity in these terms:



"From 1957 to 1960 the cadres who had remained in the South had almost all been arrested. Only one or two cadres were left in every three to five villages. What was amazing was how these one or two cadres started the movement so well.

"The explanation is not that these cadres were exceptionally gifted but the people they talked to were ready for rebellion. The people were like a mound of straw, ready to be ignited....

"If at that time the government in the South had been a good one, if it had not been dictatorial, if the agrarian reforms had worked, if it had established control at the village level, then launching the movement would have been difficult."

These interviews underscored three points on which the GVN was apparently in error. First, with respect to the stay-behinds themselves, by no means were all dedicated communists in the doctrinaire sense. Many reported that they resented and feared the communists in the Viet Minh, and apparently might have been willing to serve the GVN faithfully had it not hounded them out of the society. There were several among the group, for example, who had entered Saigon, and there found a degree of freedom which kept them off the Viet Cong roles for years. Second, with regard to the peasants in general, the Viet Minh were widely admired throughout the South as national heroes, and the GVN therefore committed a tactical error of the first magnitude in damning all Viet Minh without qualification as communists. Third, the GVN created by its rural policy a climate of moral indignation which energized the peasants politically, turned them against the government, sustained the Viet Cong, and permitted "communists" to outlast severe GVN repressions and even to recruit during it.

The foregoing precis of the 1967 study presents views which are paralleled in a captured Viet Cong history, written around 1963, which describes the years after 1954 as follows:

EXPERIENCES OF THE SOUTH VIETNAM REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT DURING  
THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS 127/

"During the past nine years, under the enlightened leadership of the Party Central Committee, the people and the Party of South Vietnam have experienced many phases along the difficult and complicated path of struggle but they have also gained many victories and experiences while pushing the South Vietnam liberation revolution and creating the conditions for peaceful reunification of the country....

"After the armistice, the South Vietnam people reverted to political struggle through peaceful means by demanding personal rights, freedom and negotiations concerning general elections in accordance with the stipulations of the Geneva Agreement so that the country could be peacefully reunified. The Party apparatus in South Vietnam also became covert. The organization and methods of operation of the

party were changed in order to guarantee the leadership and forces of the Party under the new struggle conditions....

"From the end of 1954 until 1956 several important changes occurred in the South Vietnam situation. Imperialist America ousted and replaced imperialist France, turning South Vietnam into a colony (a new type of colony) based on U.S. military power. The Ngo Dinh Diem government was clearly shown to be a government composed of bureaucratic, dictatorial and family-controlled feudalists and capitalists who committed crimes for the American imperialists and massacred the people, massacred revolutionaries and massacred the oppositionists. Both the Americans and Diem made every effort to oppose the implementation of the Geneva Agreement and made every effort to subvert the peaceful reunification of our fatherland....

"Immediately after the re-establishment of peace, the responsibility of South Vietnam was to use the political struggle to demand the implementation of the Geneva Agreement. The struggle responsibilities and procedures were appropriate for the situation at that time and corresponded with the desires of the great majority of the masses who wished for peace after nearly 10 years of difficult resistance.

"At that time, although the Americans-Diemists used cruel force to oppose the people and the revolution, and the masses struggled decisively against this repression in many places and at many times, the contradictions had not yet developed to a high degree and the hatred had not yet developed to a point where the use of armed struggle could become an essential and popular struggle tactic. In South Vietnam since 1955, thanks to the armed movement of the sects, we were able to avoid the construction of an armed propaganda force, since we only had a few former bases which were needed in the political struggle and for the creation of a reserve force.

"From 1957 to 1958, the situation gradually changed. The enemy persistently sabotaged the implementation of the Geneva Agreement, actively consolidated and strengthened the army, security service, and administrative apparatus from the central to the hamlet level, crudely assassinated the people, and truly and efficiently destroyed our Party. By relying on force, the American-Diemist regime was temporarily able to stabilize the situation and increase the prestige of the counterrevolutionaries. At this time, the political struggle movement of the masses, although not defeated, was encountering increasing difficulty and increasing weakness; the Party bases, although not completely destroyed, were significantly weakened, and in some areas, quite seriously; the prestige of the masses and of the revolution suffered. But in reality, the years during which the enemy increased his terrorism were also the years in which the enemy suffered major political losses and the social contradictions which existed became increasingly evident; the resentment of the



masses became more deep seeded and many individuals who formerly supported the enemy now opposed them. The masses, that is to say, the peasants, now realized that it was impossible to live under such conditions and that it was necessary to rise up in drastic struggle. Faced with the fact that the enemy was using guns, assassinations and imprisonment to oppose the people in their political struggle, many voices among the masses appealed to the Party to establish a program of armed resistance against the enemy. Within the Party, on the one hand, the members were saturated with the responsibility to lead the revolution to a successful overthrow of the enemy, but on the other hand, the majority of the party members and cadres felt that it was necessary to immediately launch an armed struggle in order to preserve the movement and protect the forces. In several areas the party members on their own initiative had organized armed struggle against the enemy.

"Since the end of 1958, particularly after the Phu Loi Massacre,\* the situation truly ripened for an armed movement against the enemy. But the leadership of the Nam Bo Regional Committee\*\* at that time still hesitated for many reasons, but the principal reason was the fear of violating the party line....

"Up to 1959, in South Vietnam, the Americans-Diemists had fully constructed a large army, equipped with modern weapons, along with a large and well armed administrative, police and security apparatus. During the years in which the masses were only using political struggle, the Americans-Diemists used the military, security and administrative apparatus to launch various campaigns to terrorize, mop up and oppress the movement, no different from during the period of warfare. Because they were determined to crush the revolution and control the people at every moment, they could not avoid using every type of repression.

"In opposing such an enemy, simple political struggle was not possible. It was necessary to use additional armed struggle, but not merely low level armed struggle, such as only armed propaganda, which was used to support the political struggle. The enemy would not allow us any peace, and in the face of the enemy operations and destructive pursuit, the armed propaganda teams, even if they wished to avoid losses, would never be able to engage the enemy in warfare and would never be able to become an actual revolutionary army. This is an essential fact of the movement and the actual movement in South Vietnam illustrates this fact. Therefore, at the end of 1959, when we launched an additional armed struggle in coordination with the political struggle against the enemy, it immediately took the form in South Vietnam of revolutionary warfare, a long range revolutionary warfare. Therefore, according to some opinions at the beginning of 1959, we only used heavy armed propaganda and later developed "regional guerrillas...."

\* The alleged food-poisoning of "six thousand former resistance fighters and fighters for peace and national reunification" at the political re-education center at Phu Loi, 33 km. north of Saigon, December 1, 1958; Cf., New Facts Phu Loi Mass Murder in South Vietnam (1959: Hanoi, Foreign Languages Publishing House).

\*\* The regional headquarters for Cochinchina.

That this version of events from 1954 through 1959 is the orthodox Viet Cong account is further indicated by the report of interrogation of one of the four members of the Civilian Proselyting Section of the Viet Cong Saigon/Gia Dinh Special Zone Committee, captured in November, 1964; the prisoner stated that:

"The period from the Armistice of 1954 until 1958 was the darkest time for the VC in South Vietnam. The political agitation policy proposed by the Communist Party could not be carried out due to the arrest of a number of party members by RVN authorities. The people's agitation movement was minimized. However, the organizational system of the party from the highest to the lowest echelons survived, and since the party remained close to the people, its activities were not completely suppressed. In 1959 the party combined its political agitation with its military operations, and by the end of 1959 the combined operations were progressing smoothly." 128/

Viet Cong "political agitation" was a cunning blend of the Viet Minh nationalist charisma, exploitation of GVN shortcomings, xenophobia, and terror. Drawing on the years of Viet Minh experience in subversive government and profiting from Viet Minh errors, the Viet Cong appealed to the peasants not as Marxist revolutionaries proposing a drastic social upheaval, but quite to the contrary, as a conservative, nationalist force wholly compatible with the village-centered traditionalism of most farmers, and as their recourse against "My-Diem" modernization. One American authority summed the Viet Minh experience evident in Viet Cong operations as ten political precepts:

"1. Don't try for too much; don't smash the existing social system, use it; don't destroy opposition organizations, take them over.

"2. Use the amorphous united front to attack opposition political forces too large or too powerful for you to take over; then fragment their leadership, using terror if necessary, and drown their followers in the front organization.

"3. At all times appear outwardly reasonable about the matter of sharing power with rival organizations although secretly working by every means to eliminate them. Don't posture in public.

"4. Divide your organization rigidly into overt and covert sections and minimize traffic between the two. The overt group's chief task is to generate broad public support; the covert group seeks to accumulate and manipulate political power.

"5. Use communism as dogma, stressing those aspects that are well regarded by the people; don't hesitate to interpret Marxism-Leninism in any way that proves beneficial. Soft-pedal the class-struggle idea except among cadres.

"6. Don't antagonize anyone if it can be helped; this forestalls the formation of rival blocs.



"7. Bearing in mind that in Vietnam altruism is conspicuous by its absence, blend the proper mixture of the materialistic appeals of communism and the endemic feelings of nationalism. Win small but vital gains through communism, large ones through nationalism. Plan to win in the end not as Communists but as nationalists.

"8. Use the countryside as the base and carry the struggle to the cities later; in rural areas political opportunities are greater and risks smaller. Avoid the lure of the teahouse.

"9. But forge a city alliance. Mobilization of the farmer must create a strong farmer-worker bond.

"10. Work from the small to the large, from the specific to the general; work from small safe areas to large liberated areas and then expand the liberated areas; begin with small struggle movements and work toward a General Uprising during which state power will be seized." 129/

The same expert termed General Uprising "a social myth in the Sorelian sense, perhaps traceable back to the Communist myth of the general strike," and cited Viet Cong documents which describe how the 2500 villages of Vietnam will be led toward a spontaneous final and determinant act of revolution:

"The Revolution, directed toward the goal of the General Uprising, has these five characteristics: ...It takes place in a very favorable worldwide setting....It is against the neo-colonialism of the U.S.A.....The government of Vietnam is unpopular and growing weaker....The people have revolutionary consciousness and are willing to struggle....It is led by the Party, which has great experience." 130/

Ho and Giap thus coated Marx and Mao with French revolutionary romanticism. Diem, the moral reformer, also drew heavily upon the same traditions for "personalism." One of the tragedies of modern Vietnam is that the political awakening of its peasants was to these, the most virulent, and vicious social theories of the era.

But doctrine was not the sole heritage the Viet Cong received from the Viet Minh. Perhaps more important was the "Resistance" organization: the hierarchy extending upward from hamlet and village through provincial to regional authorities capable of coordinating action on a broad scale. The Viet Minh complied with military regroupments under the Geneva Accords but were not obligated to withdraw the "political" apparatus; in fact, the Settlement provided guarantees for it in its provisions against reprisals (Armistice, Article 14c, and Conference Final Declaration, Article 9), and for liberation of political prisoners (Armistice, Article 21). Knowledge of the techniques of clandestine politics, appreciation for the essentiality of tight discipline, and trained personnel constituting a widespread, basic organizational framework were all advantages the Viet Minh conferred on the Viet Cong. Needless to say, Ngo Dinh Diem received no comparable legacy from his nationalist predecessors or the French.

### 3. Rural Violence and GVN Counters, 1957-1960.

By early 1958, Saigon was beginning to sense that pacification had eluded the GVN even as it had the French. In December, 1957, the ill-fated newspaper, Thoi Luan, pointed out that terrorism was on the rise, and that:

"Today the menace is heavier than ever, with the terrorists no longer limiting themselves to the notables in charge of security. Everything suits them, village chiefs, chairmen of liaison committees, simple guards, even former notables.... In certain areas, the village chiefs spend their nights in the security posts, while the inhabitants organize watches." 131/

"....The most urgent need for the population today is security--a question to which we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the authorities.

"Spectacular assassinations have taken place in the provinces of An Giang and Phong-Dinh [in the Mekong Delta]. In the village of Than-My-Tay, armed men appeared in the dead of night, awakened the inhabitants, read a death sentence, and beheaded four young men whose heads they nailed to the nearest bridge....

"The security question in the provinces must be given top priority: the regime will be able to consolidate itself only if it succeeds in finding a solution to this problem." 132/

Besides the incidents cited, there had been a mass murder of 17 in Chau-Doc in July, 1957; in September the District Chief at My Tho with his whole family was gunned down in daylight on a main highway; on 10 October a bomb thrown into a Cholon cafe injured 13 persons, and on 22 October, in three bombings in Saigon, 13 Americans were wounded. 133/

Also in October a clandestine radio in Vietnam purporting to speak for the "National Salvation Movement" was backing armed insurgents against Diem. 134/ In Washington, U.S. intelligence indicated that the "Viet Minh underground" had been directed to conduct additional attacks on U.S. personnel "whenever conditions are favorable." 135/ U.S. intelligence also noted a total of 30 armed "terrorist incidents initiated by Communist guerrillas" in the last quarter of 1957, as well as a "large number" of incidents carried out by "Communist-lead [sic] Hoa Hao and Cao Dai dissident elements," and reported "at least" 75 civilians or civil officials assassinated or kidnapped in the same period. 136/

Robert Shaplen wrote that:

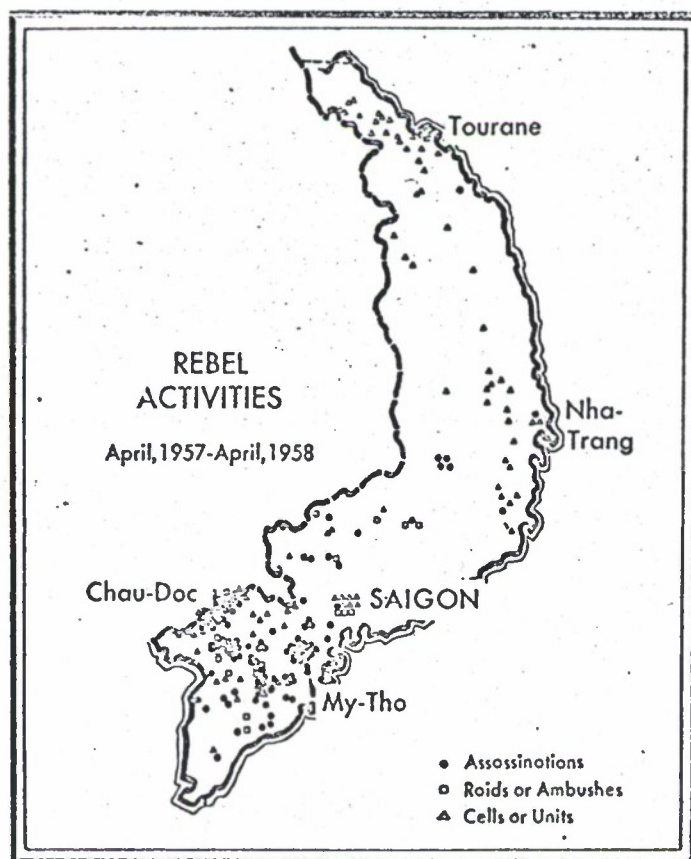
"By 1958, the Vietminh had fully resumed its campaign of terror in the countryside, kidnapping government officials and threatening villagers who in any way co-operated with the government....Military incidents in the countryside



were rising, and in an average month the local and regional units were becoming involved in a score of engagements. Usually, these were hit-and-run Communist attacks on Self-Defense Corps or Civil Guard headquarters, the purpose of which was both to seize weapons and to heighten the atmosphere of terror." 137/

Guns should have been plentiful in the countryside of Vietnam. The Japanese, the French and even the GVN armed the sect forces. And both the sects and the Viet Minh had operated small arms factories -- for instance, General Lansdale visited a Cao Dai weapons factory at Nui Ba Den in Tay Ninh in 1955. The Viet Minh cached arms as they withdrew from their "liberated areas" in 1954 and 1955. ARVN veterans and deserters from the force reductions of 1954 and 1955 carried weapons into the hinterland. The VC attacked for weapons to make up for losses to the GVN, and to equip units with similar types to simplify logistics.

In January, 1958, a "large band" of "communist" guerrillas attacked a plantation north of Saigon, and in February, an ARVN truck was ambushed on the outskirts of the capital. 138/ In March, the Saigon newspaper Dan-Cung complained that: "our people are fleeing the villages and returning to the cities for fear of communist guerrillas and feudalistic officials...." 139/ Bernard Fall published an article in July, 1958, in which he mapped the pattern of assassinations and other incidents from April 1957 to April 1958, and announced the onset of a new war:



THE BEGINNING OF THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR

Fall's thesis was challenged by a senior U.S. adviser to the GVN, who argued that the increasing casualty figures represented not a structured attempt to overthrow the GVN, but were simply a product of police reporting in the hinterlands. 140/ There can be no doubt that the latter view was partially correct: neither the U.S. nor the GVN knew what was "normal" in the rural areas, and police reporting, with U.S. aid, had been improved. But the deadly figures continued to mount. George A. Carver of the CIA, in his 1966 Foreign Affairs article, agreed with Fall:

"A pattern of politically motivated terror began to emerge, directed against the representatives of the Saigon government and concentrated on the very bad and the very good. The former were liquidated to win favor with the peasantry; the latter because their effectiveness was a bar to the achievement of Communist objectives. The terror was directed not only against officials but against all whose operations were essential to the functioning of organized political society, school teachers, health workers, agricultural officials, etc. The scale and scope of this terrorist and insurrectionary activity mounted slowly and steadily. By the end of 1958 the participants in this incipient insurgency, whom Saigon quite accurately termed the "Viet Cong," constituted a serious threat to South Viet Nam's political stability." 141/

Like most other statistics concerning Vietnam, figures on the extent of the terrorism varied widely. The GVN reported to the ICC that in 1957, 1958, and the first half of 1959, Viet Cong murdered 65 village officials, 51 civilians, 28 Civil Guardsmen, and 10 soldiers. 142/ GVN official reports provided the U.S. Embassy in Saigon recorded a significantly greater toll of civilians:

CIVILIAN ASSASSINATIONS AND  
KIDNAPPINGS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By Quarter, From GVN Reports to U.S. Embassy 143/

	1958					1959					1960
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>First 5 Months</u>
Murders	72	51	26	44		52	34	46	97		
Total					193					233	780
Abductions	73	32	66	65		44	53	67	179		
Total					236					343	282

Journalists and scholars, studying open sources, put the figures even higher. Douglas Pike reported 1700 assassinations and 2000 abductions in the years 1957-1960. 144/ Bernard Fall estimated murders of low-level GVN officials as follows:

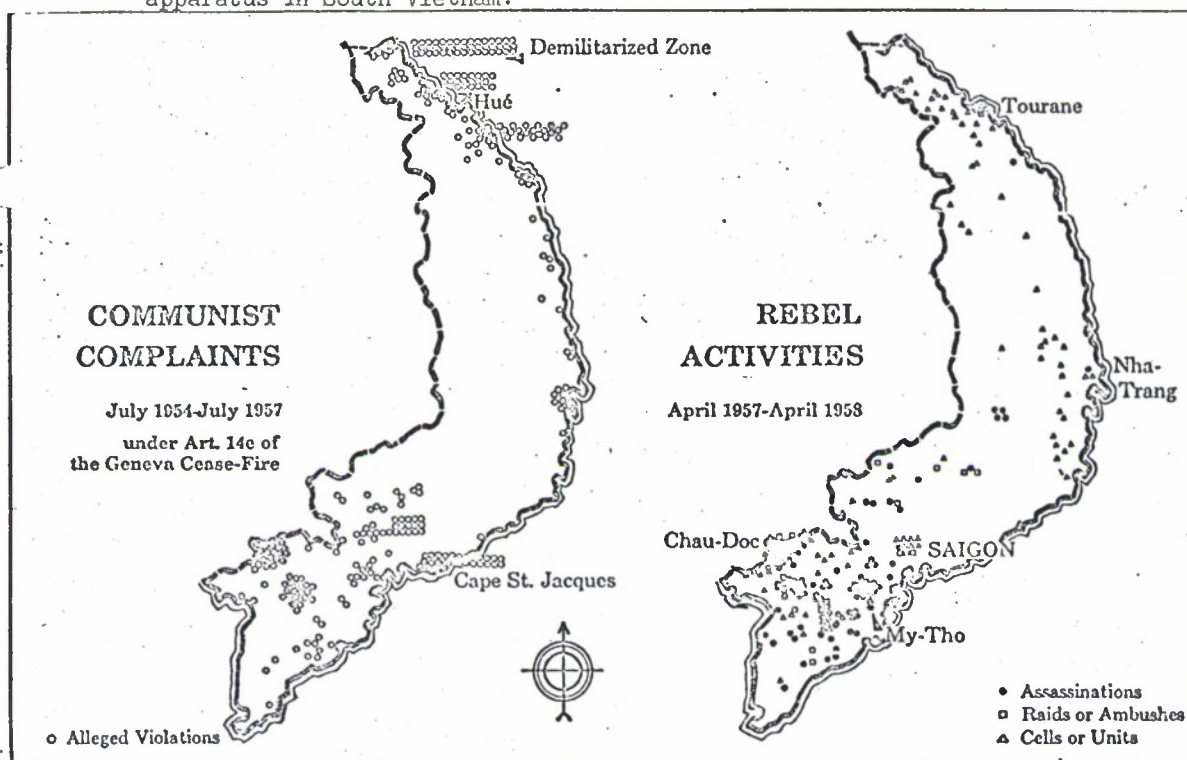
<u>May 1957</u>	<u>May 1958</u>	<u>May 1959</u>	<u>May 1960</u>	<u>May 1961</u>
700	1200	2500	4000	

Fall reported that the GVN lost almost 20% of its village chiefs in 1957



and 1958, and that by the end of 1959, they were becoming casualties at the rate of more than 2% per month. Through 1963, Fall calculated, 13,000 petty officials were eliminated by the VC. <sup>145/</sup> The New York Times estimated that 3,000 local government officials were killed or captured during 1960 <sup>146/</sup>, and TIME magazine reported in the fall of 1960 that the GVN was losing 250 to 300 per month to a "new Communist offensive." The U.S. "White Paper" of 1961 cited losses of 1400 local officials and civilians during 1960. <sup>148/</sup> But if there was disparity among numerical estimates, most reports, public or private, concluded that the violence was real, anti-government, rising in intensity, and increasingly organized.

In mid-1958 Bernard Fall correlated the locus of rural violence reported in South Vietnam with complaints lodged with the ICC in Hanoi by the DRV on behalf of "Former Resistance members," alleging GVN violations of the "no reprisals" provisions of the Geneva Accords (Armistice, Article 14c). The detail in these complaints indicated an intelligence apparatus in South Vietnam.



"The conclusion is inescapable," he wrote, "that there must be some coordination between the rebels and the North Vietnamese Government." <sup>149/</sup> About that same time, U.S. intelligence reported that Viet Cong-bandit operations north of Saigon seemed to be part of a calculated campaign of economic sabotage. <sup>150/</sup> Also, reports began to come in of a new "Front" operating in the countryside. Anthropologist Gerald Hickey wrote of

the village near My Tho which he studied very intensively that around mid-1958:

"...For the first time [the village] experienced the activities of a relatively new political movement--Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam (National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam) referred to by the South Vietnamese government as the Viet Cong or Vietnamese Communists...and invariably called the Viet Minh by the villagers. In the vicinity of [the village] the initial efforts of the Viet Cong were largely confined to anti-government propaganda." 151/

One VC pamphlet of late 1958 from the Mekong Delta reads as follows:

"Support the just struggle of the people to overthrow the government of the Americans and Diem [My-Diem], to establish a democratic regime in the South, and to work for general elections which will unify the country by peaceful means." 152/

But, if "struggle" sounds innocuous enough in English, the word fails to carry the intensity of the Vietnamese equivalent, dau tranh. A VC rallier put it this way:

"Dau tranh is all important to a revolutionist. It marks his thinking, his attitudes, his behavior. His life, his revolutionary work, his whole world is dau tranh. The essence of his existence is dau tranh." 153/

And, the term "just struggle of the people" sheathed the terror integral to Viet Cong operations. In Pike's estimate:

"Insurgency efforts in the 1958-1960 period involved violence such as assassinations but few actual armed attacks. This was so partly because the cadres had little military capability but chiefly because doctrine counseled against violence....

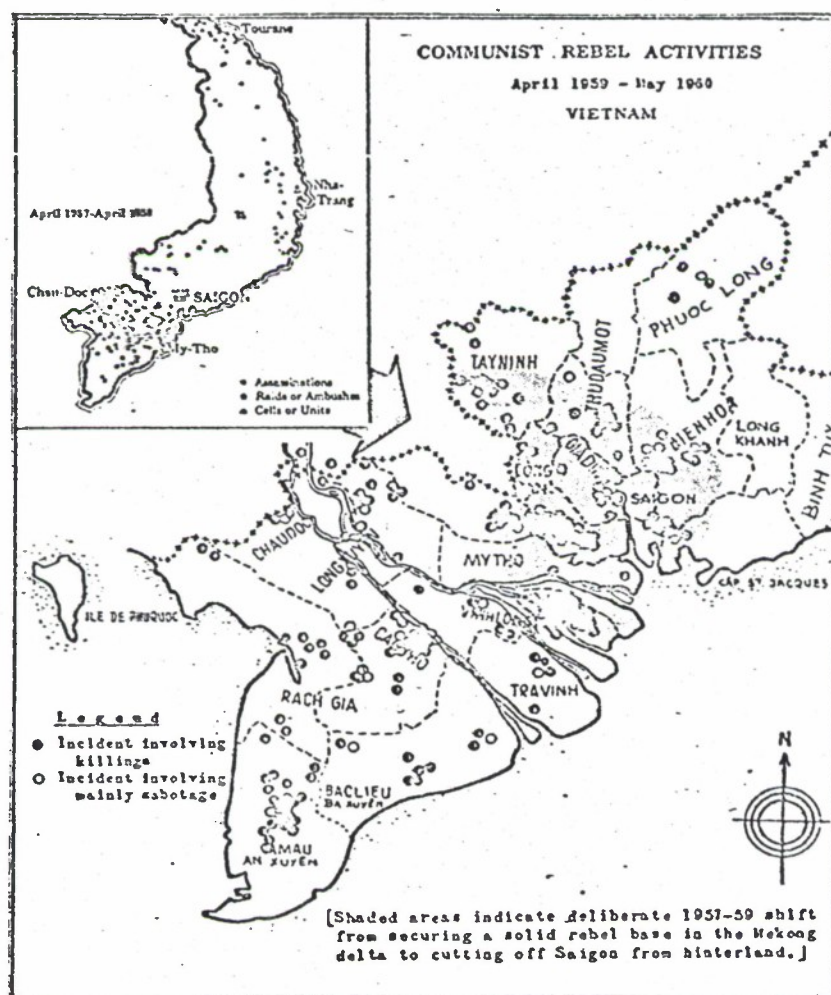
"For the true believers operating throughout the South this was a time of surreptitious meetings, cautious political feelers, the tentative assembling of a leadership group, and the sounding out of potential cadres whose names went into a file for future reference. It meant working mainly with non-Communists and, in many cases, keeping one's Communist identity a secret...." 154/

Diem's own party newspaper, the NRM's Cach Mang Quoc Gia, published an article in February, 1959 which reported that "the situation in the rural areas is rotten," and described communist cells established in the villages collecting taxes and conducting "espionage," supporting local guerrilla forces responsive to a hierarchy of provincial and regional committees. 155/



From mid-1959 onward, there was a definite upsurge in Viet Cong activity, marked not only by the increase in terrorism noted in the statistics presented above, but also by the fielding of large military units which sought, rather than avoided, engagement with units of Diem's regular army. On 26 September 1959 two companies of the ARVN 23d Division were ambushed by a well-organized force of several hundred identified as the "2d Liberation Battalion"; the ARVN units lost 12 killed, 14 wounded, and most of their weapons. 156/

On 25 January 1960 the same Viet Cong battalion launched an attack coordinated with four guerrilla companies -- a total force of 300 to 500 men -- which penetrated the compound of the 32d Regiment, 21st ARVN Division at Tay Ninh, killed 23 ARVN soldiers, and netted a large haul of arms and ammunition. 157/ On 29 January 1960 an insurgent band seized the town of Dong Xoai, some sixty miles north of Saigon, held the place for several hours, and robbed a French citizen of 200,000 piasters. 158/ In the same month, large VC forces opened operations in the Camau peninsula and the Mekong Delta. In Kien Hoa province VC units numbering hundreds effectively isolated the province capital from six of its eight districts. 159/ Bernard Fall, in his continuing study of Viet Cong operations, detected a new strategy operating: a shift during 1959 and early 1960 from base development in the Delta to isolation of Saigon. 160/



Whether or not the incidents plotted by Fall constituted a strategy as he thought, they were patently more coherent. A U.S. intelligence assessment submitted 7 March 1960 described VC plans, confirmed from a variety of U.S. and GVN sources, to launch large scale guerrilla warfare that year "under the flag of the People's Liberation Movement," which was identified as "red, with a blue star." 161/ The VC were reportedly moving into position to exercise one or more of three strategic options by the end of 1960: (1) incite an ARVN revolt; (2) set up a popular front government in the lower Delta; (3) force the GVN into such repressive countermeasures that popular uprisings will follow. 162/

An ARVN coup d'etat did ensue, although it was neither VC incited nor successful; nor was there any general revolt in the ranks. No popular front government was set up. But the GVN was prompted to a succession of repressive countermeasures which may have aided the Viet Cong much as they had expected. Prodded by the rural violence, Diem began his "counterinsurgency" in early 1959 with the reintensification of population classification and relocation programs. On 6 May 1959, the GVN promulgated Law 10/59, which set up three military tribunals which could, without appeal, adjudge death for crimes under Ordinance 47 of 1956 -- the anti-communist law. In actuality, these tribunals were used sparingly, usually for show-case trials of terrorists. 163/ But the existence of Law 10/59 furnished grist for VC propaganda mills for years.

On 7 July, 1959, the GVN launched its "prosperity and density centers" -- the "agrovillage" program and Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife plunged into organizing rural youth, women, and farmers' organizations. However, just as the VC Tet offensive of 1968 attenuated "Revolutionary Development," the VC upsurge of late 1959 and early 1960 disrupted the new GVN organizational efforts, and reinforced Diem's conviction that security was the paramount consideration. The U.S. assessment of March 1960 cited widespread abuse of police powers by local officials for extortion and vendetta, and pointed out that arbitrary and corrupt local officials compromised GVN efforts to root out the VC "undercover cadres." Moreover:

....While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations through community development, the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, etc., these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment. Basically, the problem appears to be that such



projects have been imposed on the people without adequate psychological preparation in terms of the benefits to be gained. Since most of these projects call for sacrifice on the part of the population (in the form of allegedly "volunteer" labor in the case of construction, time away from jobs or school labor in the case of rural youth groups, leaving homes and lands in the case of regrouping isolated peasants), they are bound to be opposed unless they represent a partnership effort for mutual benefit on the part of the population and the government....

"The situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment." 164/

#### 4. The Founding of the National Liberation Front

Despite their expanding military effort, the Viet Cong remained a formless, "faceless" foe until late in 1960, when the National Liberation Front was announced as the superstructure of the insurgent apparatus, and the political voice of the rebellion. Thereafter, the Viet Cong sought publicity, and thereby acquired identity as a South Vietnam-wide organization of three major components: the NLF itself, the Liberation Army of South Vietnam, and the People's Revolutionary Party.

##### a. Organization and Objectives

The precise dates of the forming of the NLF constitutes one of the puzzles of the war. As mentioned above, in the years 1954 to 1960, peasants, captured documents and prisoners referred frequently to "the Front," meaning the insurgent movement, and "Front" flags had been captured as early as 1959. These were probably references to Viet Minh carry-over organizations, such as they were, rather than a specific leadership group or structure, with a set of defined objectives. Nguyen Huu Tho, the first Chairman of the NLF, stated in a 1964 interview over Radio Hanoi that:

"Although formally established in December 1960, the Front had existed as a means of action without by-laws or program since 1954 when we founded the Saigon-Cholon Peace Committee....Many of the members of the [NLF] Central Committee were also members of the Peace Committee...." 165/

Huynh Tan Phat, Tho's Vice Chairman in the NLF, was reported in late 1955 serving on the "Executive Committee of the Fatherland Front" (Mat Tran To Quoc), controlling joint Viet Minh-Hoa Hao operations against the GVN in the Plain of Reeds. (CIA Memo 1603/66, I-27).

The MAAG "Narrative Statement" for January 1958<sup>July 1957</sup> reported that "the Communists have been joining 'front' organizations to influence portions of anti-government minorities....[Examples are] the 'Vietnamese Peoples' Liberation Movement Forces' [and]...., the 'Vietnam-Cambodian Buddhist Association'".

A number of authorities, mainly French, have lent credence to an assertion that the NLF was formed by a group of Viet Minh veterans in March, 1960, somewhere in Cochinchina; but the NLF, as such, received no international publicity until after December 20, 1960. 166/ On January 29, 1961, Hanoi Radio broadcast in English to Europe and Asia its first announcement concerning the NLF:

"A 'National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam' was recently formed in South Vietnam by various forces opposing the fascist Ngo Dinh Diem regime. This was revealed by Reuters in Saigon and by different papers published in... Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. This Front was created after a period of preparation and after a conference of representatives of various forces opposing the fascist regime in South Vietnam. According to these forces, the 'National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam' on December 20, 1960, issued a political program and a manifesto...[the manifesto] reads: 'For a period of nearly a hundred years, the Vietnamese people repeatedly rose up to fight against foreign aggression for national independence and freedom.... When the French colonialists invaded our country for the second time, our compatriots -- determined not to return to the former slavery -- made tremendous sacrifices to defend national sovereignty and independence. The solidarity and heroic struggle of our compatriots during nine years led the resistance war to victory. The 1954 Geneva Agreements re-installed peace in our country and recognized the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam. Under these circumstances, our compatriots in South Vietnam would have been able to live in peace, earn their livelihood in security and build a life of plenty and happiness. However, American imperialists who had in the past helped the French colonialists massacre our people have now replaced the French in subjugating the southern part of our country through a disguised colonial regime....The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam calls on the entire people to unite and heroically rise up and struggle with the following program of action:

'NORTH VIETNAM

'Jan. 31, 1961

"1--To overthrow the disguised colonial regime of the imperialists and the dictatorial administration, and to form a national and democratic coalition administration.



"2--To carry out a broad and progressive democracy, promulgate the freedom of expression, of the press, of belief, reunion, association and of movement and other democratic freedoms; to carry out general amnesty of political detainees, dissolve the concentration camps dubbed 'prosperity zones' and 'resettlement centers,' abolish the fascist law 10-59 and other antidemocratic laws.

"3--Abolish the economic monopoly of the United States and its henchmen, protect homemade products, encourage the home industry, expand agriculture, and build an independent and sovereign economy; to provide jobs to unemployed people, increase wages for workers, army men, and office employees; to abolish arbitrary fines and apply an equitable and rational tax system; to help forced evacuees from North Vietnam who now desire to rejoin their native places; and to provide jobs to those who want to remain.

"4--To carry out land rent reduction, guarantee the peasants' right to till their present plots of land, and redistribute communal land in preparation for land reform.

5--To eliminate the U.S.-style culture of enslavement and depravation; to build a national and progressive culture and education, eliminate illiteracy, open more schools, and carry out reform in the educational and examination system.

"6--To abolish the system of American military advisers, eliminate foreign military bases in Vietnam, and to build a national army defending the fatherland and the people.

"7--To realize equality between men and women, and among different nationalities, and realize the right to autonomy of the national minorities in the country; to protect the legitimate interests of foreign residents in Vietnam; to protect and take care of the interests of overseas Vietnamese.

"8--To carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality; to establish diplomatic relations with all the countries which respect the independence and sovereignty of Vietnam.

"9--To reestablish normal relations between the two zones of Vietnam for the attainment of peaceful reunification of the country.

"10--To oppose aggressive wars, actively defend world peace."

The manifesto concludes by calling on various strata of the people to close their ranks and to carry out the above program. The appeal was addressed to the workers, peasants, and other

working people, to the intellectuals, the industrialists, and trades, national minorities, religious communities, democratic personalities, patriotic army men, and young men and women in South Vietnam.

'Addressing the Vietnamese living abroad, the manifesto called on them "to turn their thoughts to the beloved motherland and actively contribute to the sacred struggle for national emancipation." ' "

It is clear that the NLF was not intended as an exclusively communist enterprise. Rather it was designed to encompass anti-GVN activists, and to exploit the bi-polar nature of politics within South Vietnam. In the period 1954-1960, prior to the NLF's "creation," the objectives of insurgents in the South, other than overthrow of My-Diem, were vague. Communists in the South no doubt shared the overall objectives of the DRV, and were aiming at unification of all Vietnam under the Hanoi government. Some rebel nationalists were no doubt aware of the communists' ambitions, but would have regarded such an outcome as acceptable, if not desirable. Others, disillusioned by the actions of the Diem regime after 1956, simply looked toward the establishment of a genuine democratic government in the South. Some peasants may have been fighting to rid themselves of government, or to oppose modernization, looking only to village autonomy. The sects, if not struggling for a democratic regime, were fighting for their independence, as were some of the tribal groups who chose to join the NLF. The National Liberation Front formulated and publicly articulated objectives for all these.

Subsequent editions of the NLF Manifesto differed in two substantive respects: George Carver reported that:

"On February 11, 1961, Hanoi devoted a second broadcast to the N.L.F.'s manifesto and program, blandly changing the language of both to tone down the more blatant Communist terminology of the initial version. However, even the milder second version (which became the 'official' text) borrowed extensively from Le Duan's September speech /at the Third National Congress of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi/ and left little doubt about the Front's true sponsors or objectives." 167/

The "tone down" of communism was fairly subtle, if Hanoi so intended its revision, since the alterations consisted mainly in additions to the Ten Points of phraseology drawn from the preamble of the Manifesto; references to "agrarian reform," in those terms, were, however, cut. There was a marked increase in condemnatory citations of "My-Diem," so that, in eight of ten points in the action program, expelling the U.S. was clearly identified as the way the desired goal would be reached. 168/

Pike refers to an "organizing congress" of the NLF held in December, 1960, of 60 participants, at which plans were announced for



convening the first regular NLF congress within a year. Several postponements obtruded, and the meeting did not take place until February-March 1962. Nonetheless, a Central Committee continued in the interim to further define NLF purposes; the subsequent statements differed from the 1960 Manifesto mainly on points of emphasis. For example, "reunification of the country" (Point 9 of the Manifesto) was down-played from 1960 through 1963. On the first anniversary of the NLF Manifesto, 20 December 1961, its leaders issued a supplementary series of interim or "immediate action" demands. These called for:

1. Withdrawal of all U.S. military personnel and weapons from South Vietnam and abolition of the Staley Plan.
2. An end to hostilities.
3. Establishment of political freedoms.
4. Release of political prisoners.
5. Dissolution of the National Assembly and election of a new assembly and president.
6. Ending the resettlement program.
7. Solution of Vietnam's economic problems.
8. Establishment of a foreign policy of non-alignment.

Although "immediate action" was probably intended to open the way toward formation of a coalition government and thence to ties with Hanoi, there was no mention of reunification; nonetheless, Hanoi in December, 1961, listed NLF objectives as "peace, independence, democracy, a comfortable life, and the peaceful unification of the Fatherland." One likely reason for the NLF's omission of reunification from "immediate action" was its desire to broaden its base on anti-Diem, anti-U.S. grounds--without alienating anti-Communists who might otherwise support the movement. Again, when the first regular NLF congress met from February 16 to March 3, 1962, the earlier basic objectives of the Front were endorsed, excepting reunification. The Radio Hanoi broadcast on the congress added "advancing to peaceful unification of the Fatherland" to a list from which this objective was conspicuously absent in the NLF releases. On July 20, 1962, the anniversary of the Geneva Accords, the NLF issued a declaration that:

"The Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam believes that in the spirit of Vietnamese dealing with Vietnamese solving their own internal affairs, with the determination to put the Fatherland's interest above all else, the forces that oppose U.S. imperialism in South Vietnam will, through mutual concessions, be able to reach a common agreement for united action to serve the people." 170/

The same statement contained a new "four point manifesto":

"1. The U.S. government must end its armed aggression against South Vietnam, abolish its military command, withdraw all its troops and personnel, as well as the troops and personnel of U.S. satellites and allies, and withdraw all weapons and other war equipment from South Vietnam.

"2. Concerned parties in South Vietnam must stop the war, re-establish peace, and establish conditions throughout South Vietnam to enable the South Vietnamese to solve their own internal affairs. The South Vietnam authority [that is, government] must end its terror operations.

"3. There must be established a national coalition government, to include representatives of all political parties, cliques, groups, all political tendencies, social strata, members of all religions. This government must guarantee peace. It must organize free general elections in South Vietnam to choose a democratic National Assembly that will carry out the urgently needed policies. It must promulgate democratic liberties to all political parties, groups, religions; it must release all political prisoners, abolish all internment camps and all other forms of concentration [camps], and stop the forced draft of soldiers and the military training of youth, women, public servants, and enterprise, economic independence. It must abolish monopolies and improve the living conditions of all people.

"4. South Vietnam must carry out a foreign policy of peace and neutrality. It must establish friendly relations with all nations, especially with her neighbors. It must not enter any military bloc or agree to let any country establish military bases on her soil. It must accept aid from all countries [if] free of political conditions. A necessary international agreement must be signed in which the big powers of all blocs pledge to respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and neutrality of South Vietnam. South Vietnam, together with Cambodia and Laos, will form a neutral area, all three countries retaining full sovereignty." 171/

As the anticipated fall of the Diem government drew near in 1963, NLF statements of goals increasingly stressed the anti-American, probably to shift the focus of NLF attack away from a disappearing objective--the defeat of Diem, and possibly because the NLF could not manipulate or adapt to the Buddhist struggle movement. Demands issued by the NLF five days following Diem's fall in November, 1963, were probably intended to take credit for changes in GVN policy then underway, since, except for halting conscription, the Duong Van Minh government was undertaking every reform the NLF called for. However, the first extensive official statement of the NLF Central Committee following Diem's downfall, issued



November 17, 1963, did reassert the reunification objective:

"Concerning the reunification of Vietnam, as was expounded many times by the South Vietnam National Liberation Front, the Vietnam Fatherland Front and the DRV government, it will be realized step by step on a voluntary basis, with consideration given to the characteristics of each zone, with equality, and without annexation of one zone by the other." 172/

Concerning coalition government there was less vacillation in NLF emphasis, although there was some detectable variation in the welcome extended from time to time to anti-communist political movements. Similarly, the objective of "neutralization" was constant. Cambodia was held up as a model, and there was some implication in early NLF statements that it would accept international supervision of "neutralization." Beginning in 1963 NLF statements were couched to convey the notion that "reunification" and "neutralization" were distinct one from the other, apparently out of deference to DRV reaction against proposals to neutralize North Vietnam. 173/

b. Leadership

The NLF founders were shadowy figures most of whom had earned modest reputations on the murky fringes of Vietnamese politics. They seem to have been chosen with an eye to avoiding known Communists, and to obtaining wide representation from South Vietnam's complicated society. Although the NLF Central Committee reserved places for 52 members, only 31 names were publicized as founding members, indicating either a large covert membership, or, more likely, simple inability to find eligible persons to fill the posts. 174/ A U.S. study of 73 NLF leaders in 1965 indicated that almost all were born in South Vietnam, and almost all were highly educated. 175/ Most had histories of anti-French political activity, or identification with religious movements, and it appears that if many were not themselves crypto-communists, they had known and worked with communists for years. The prime example of the group is Nguyen Huu Tho, who was the first formally elected chairman of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the NLF. Tho was a Cochinese lawyer, once a socialist, who spent some months with the Viet Minh in the Mekong Delta in 1947. He thereafter led anti-French and anti-US demonstrations, defended a number of Vietnamese before Saigon courts for crimes related to the "Resistance," and served some time in French jails. He also edited a clandestine Viet Minh newspaper aimed at Saigon intellectuals. In August, 1954, he became vice chairman of the leftist Saigon Peace Committee, or Movement for the Defense of Peace (MDP). In November, 1954, according to CIA information, Tho and others in the MDP were arrested, and Tho spent the next seven years in Diem's detention centers. Mysteriously released in December, 1961, the CIA reported him elected to NLF office at the congress of March, 1962. 176/ Douglas Pike's information has Tho active in Saigon politics through 1958, at which time he was jailed. His NLF biography states that "he was liberated by a daring guerrilla raid on the jail in 1961," but Pike, unable to find any record of such a raid, concludes that Tho was provisional chairman of the NLF, and was elected Central Committee Chairman at the organizing meeting in December 1960. 177/

c. Development

The NLF rapidly took on organizational reality from the Central Committee down through a web of subordinate and associated groups to villages all over Vietnam. Pike estimates that within a few months of its founding in December, 1960, its membership doubled, doubled again by autumn, 1961, and then redoubled by early 1962, at which time 300,000 Vietnamese were on its rolls. 178/ These were members of the "liberation associations," NLF per se, of which there were administrative associations (e.g., provincial headquarters) and functional associations (e.g., Youth Liberation Association); or, they belonged to one of several political parties, including the communist party, affiliated with the NLF; or, they served in the Liberation Army. Normally, each man, woman and child belonged to many organizations simultaneously. A French analysis of Viet Minh organization aptly described the NLF:

"The individual is enchained in several networks of independent hierarchies...a territorial hierarchy...running from the family and the block to the interprovincial government, and associations that incorporate male and female youth groups, groups of mothers, of farmers, factory, and plantation workers' syndicates... they could just as well include clubs of flute players or bicycle racers; the essential thing is that no one escapes from this enrollment and that the territorial hierarchy is crossed by another one, which supervises the first and is in turn supervised by it, both being overseen by police or organizations and the [Communist] Party...." 179/

The key operational components of the NLF were the Liberation Army and the People's Revolutionary Party, as the communists within the NLF termed themselves. The former had a lien on the services of every NLF member, man, woman or child, although functionally its missions were usually carried out by formally organized and trained paramilitary or full-time units. All "Viet Cong" units were, from 1961 on, regarded as part of the Liberation Army.

There can be little doubt that communists played a major role in organizing the NLF. Although Diem's Communist Denunciation campaign had foreclosed "Front" activity, the communists of South Vietnam possessed the leadership, tight subordination and conspiratorial doctrine necessary for them to survive; moreover, they were, as Milton Sacks characterized them, "the most persevering, most cohesive, best-disciplined, and most experienced political group in Vietnam." 180/ The People's Revolutionary Party was not formed until January, 1962; it was explicitly the "Marxist-Leninist Party of South Vietnam," and it purported to be the "vanguard of the NLF, the paramount member." 181/ In 1962, it had some 35,000 members. 182/ The Lao Dong Party had continued low level overt activity, as well as covert operations, in South Vietnam throughout the years 1955 to 1962. For example, leaflets were distributed over the Lao Dong imprimatur. 183/ But the PRP denied official links with the Lao Dong Party of the DRV beyond "fraternal ties of communism." 184/ The denial implies the question: what role



did the DRV and the Lao Dong Party play in the years of patient work necessary to bring the NLF to flower in so short a time after 1960? What role did they play in the insurgency overall?

The official U.S. view has been that the PRP is merely the southern arm of the Lao Dong Party, and one instrument by which Hanoi instigated and controlled the revolt against "My-Diem." 185/ Douglas Pike's analysis led him to concur, with reservations:

"The Viet Minh elements in South Vietnam during the struggle against the French had of course included many non-Communist elements....After 1954 many Viet Minh entered the ranks of the new Diem government, and even a decade later many of the top military and civilian governmental figures in Saigon were former Viet Minh. Nevertheless the Viet Minh elements, made up chiefly but not entirely of Communists, continued to offer resistance to the Diem government....In terms of overt activity such as armed incidents of the distribution of propaganda leaflets the period was quiet and the Communists within the remnant Viet Minh organization relatively inactive. In addition, much of the activity that did take place apparently was the work of impatient cadres operating in the South independently of Hanoi's orders....

"Such action on their part and the religious sects is understandable, and the emergence of a clandestine militant opposition group could be expected....such an effort would be in complete harmony with Vietnamese social tradition and individual psychology. But there is a vast difference between a collection of clandestine opposition political groups and the organizational weapon that emerged, a difference in kind and not just degree. The National Liberation Front was not simply another indigenous covert group, or even a coalition of such groups. It was an organizational steamroller, nationally conceived and nationally organized, endowed with ample cadres and funds, crashing out of the jungle to flatten the GVN. It was not an ordinary secret society of the kind that had dotted the Vietnamese political landscape for decades. It projected a social construction program of such scope and ambition that of necessity it must have been created in Hanoi and imported. A revolutionary organization must build; it begins with persons suffering genuine grievances, who are slowly organized and whose militancy gradually increases until a critical mass is reached and the revolution explodes. Exactly the reverse was the case with the NLF. It sprang full-blown into existence and then was fleshed out. The grievances were developed or manufactured almost as a necessary afterthought. The creation of the NLF was an accomplishment of such skill, precision, and refinement that when one thinks of who the master planner must have been, only one name comes to mind: Vietnam's organizational genius, Ho Chi Minh." 186/

HANOI AND THE INSURGENCY IN SOUTH VIETNAMA. Character of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Between 1954 and 1960, Ho Chi Minh had to face in North Vietnam, as did Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, the problem of building a nation out of the ruins of nearly a decade of war. During those years, until the DRV declared its support for the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, Ho seemed preoccupied with the problems of consolidating his regime and securing the foreign aid he needed to assure economic growth. Certainly agricultural shortages and popular unrest in North Vietnam in the immediate aftermath of Geneva were sufficiently serious to have discouraged foreign adventures through 1956. However, by January, 1961, when Hanoi announced the formation of the NLF, the internal difficulties of the DRV seem to have been largely resolved. Inquiry into the timing and extent of the DRV's participation in the insurgency of South Vietnam, therefore, requires assessment of those conditions within the DRV which might have affected its capability and willingness to prosecute a war of aggression.

1. Structure of the Government. He possessed one distinct advantage over Diem: his government had been in existence, in one form or another, continuously since 1945. Ho and his lieutenants ruled in radically differing circumstances as the status of the regime shifted from that of a state within the French Union in 1946, to a belligerent in a colonial revolution, and back to a sovereign state in 1954, preserving remarkable continuity. The Geneva Conference of 1954 restored its actual territorial dominion to about what it had been in 1954, in that France acceded to a cease-fire based upon a territorial division of Vietnam at the 17th parallel and to Viet Minh "conduct of civil administration" in the regions to the north, pending "general elections." 1/ The withdrawal of French military forces and civil authority from northern Vietnam was coordinated with the DRV forces and leaders so that the latter systematically replaced the former; by the end of May 1955, the DRV had acquired full control of all its territory, and began to act as a sovereign state. 2/ However, formal recognition of DRV statehood dates from January, 1950 (China and Soviet Union), and best information now available to the U.S. Department of State indicates that thereafter twenty-two other nations established relations with it. 3/ Formally, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was organized under a Constitution promulgated in 1946 which, in language echoing Jefferson, guaranteed civic freedoms, and reposed principal state power in a people's parliament. A second Constitution was adopted on January 1, 1960, more explicitly drawn from communist thought, resembling the Chinese Constitution in general, but containing Soviet style clauses on civil rights and autonomy of national minorities.



a. Constitution of 1946

The 1946 basic law declared Vietnam to be a democratic republic in which all power belonged to the people "without distinction of race, class, creed, wealth, or sex." Its territory, "composed of Bac-Bo, or Northern Viet Nam (Tonkin), Trung-Bo or Central Viet Nam (Annam), and Nam-Bo or Southern Viet Nam (Cochinchina) is one and indivisible... The capital of Viet Nam is Hanoi. 4/ However, the Constitution of 1946 was never institutionalized; instead, the exigencies of the war with the French eventuated in a government which was literally an administrative extension of the rigidly disciplined political apparatus headed by Ho Chi Minh and encadred by his colleagues from the Indochinese Communist Party. Pham Van Dong (presently Premier, then Vice President) announced in 1950 that promulgation of the 1946 Constitution had been postponed "because several of its provisions require for their application the cessation of the state of war," 5/ and in 1951, after Ho had openly aligned with the Sino-Soviet powers, the Viet Minh radio explained that "a gang of traitors" had been evolved in its formulation, and hence a "progressive character was lacking." In late 1956, the DRV set up a constitutional reform committee. 6/ In December, 1958, Ho invited the public to submit recommendations on a new draft basic law, and the second Constitution was promulgated in 1960.

b. Constitution of 1960

The 1960 Preamble speaks of a thousand years of struggle for independence, lauds Ho Chi Minh and the Lao Dong (Communist) Party, cites harshly United States "imperialists" and "interventionists," and presents this interpretation of the aftermath of Geneva, 1954-1960: 7/

"....In the South, the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen have been savagely repressing the patriotic movement of our people. They have been strengthening military forces and carrying out their scheme of turning the southern part of our country into a colony and military base for their war preparations. They have resorted to all possible means to sabotage the Geneva Agreements and undermine the cause of Viet Nam's reunification...."

"....Under the clear-sighted leadership of the Viet Nam Lao-Dong Party, the government of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, and President Ho Chi Minh, our entire people, broadly united within the National United Front, will surely win glorious success in the building of socialism in North Viet-Nam and the struggle for national reunification."

Both the opening sentence of the Preamble and Article 1 of Chapter I of the Constitution itself, stipulate that Viet Nam is an entity indivisible from China to Camau in South Vietnam. Chapter II of the Constitution, which precedes the section on human rights, announces step by step that the DRV is advancing from "people's democracy to socialism...transforming

its backward economy into a socialist economy with modern industry and agriculture...." "Communism" (or a derivative term) is not mentioned as such, but the document is otherwise explicit that the economy is to be state-centered; e.g.:

"Article 12. The state sector of the economy, which is a form of ownership by the whole people, plays the leading role in the national economy. The state ensures priority for its development."

"Article 17. The state strictly...prohibits the use of private property to disrupt the economic life of the society or to undermine the economic plan of the state...."

Chapter III is a hyper-democratic guarantee of civil rights, and the remainder provides for an elected National Assembly and a centralized, statist public administration. 8/

## 2. Political Parties

### a. Lao Dong Party

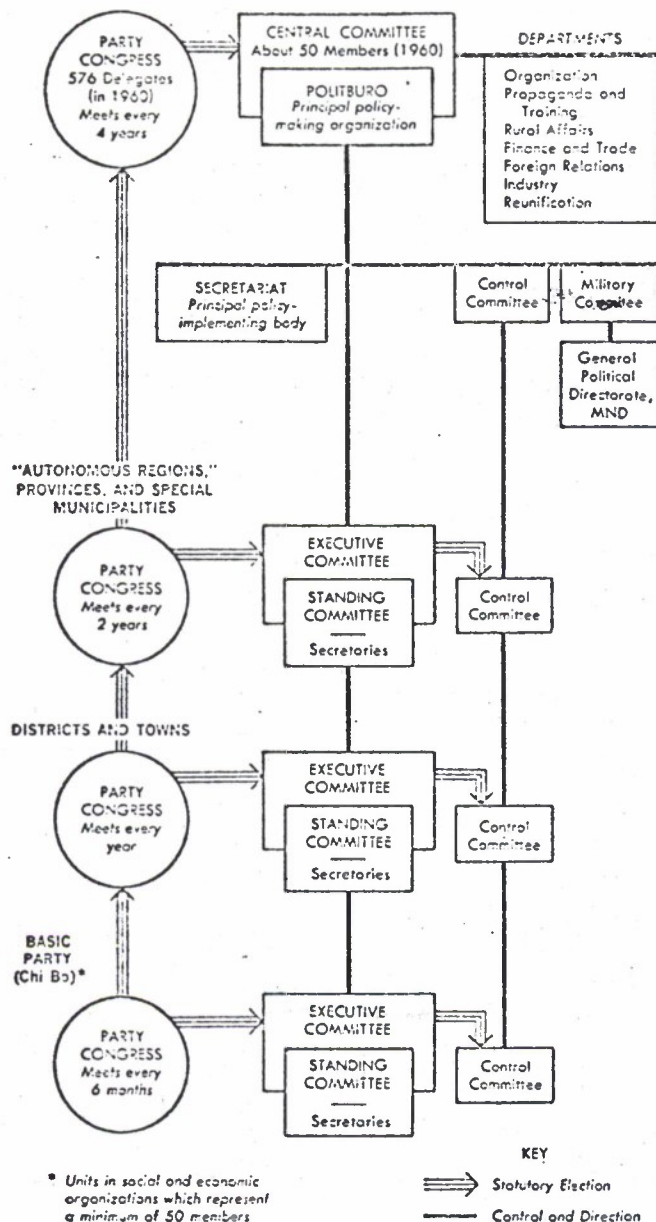
Unrecognized by the 1960 Constitution except in the Preamble's encomiums, the Lao Dong Party (Dang Lao Dong Vietnam, or Vietnamese Workers' Party) is the dominant political power within the DRV. It is an expressly Marxist-Leninist Party which traces its lineage back to the Indochinese Communist Party founded by Ho Chi Minh, and although the ICP was abolished in 1946, claims to have been prime mover in the major nationalist "front" movements through 1951, when the DRV "legalized" the Party. For example, Vo Nguyen Giap explained that:

"The Vietnamese people's war of liberation was victorious because we had a wide and firm National United Front...organized and led by the Party of the working class: the Indochinese Communist Party, now the Vietnam Workers' [Lao Dong] Party. In the light of the principles of Marxism-Leninism...the Party found a correct solution to the problems...." 9/

Party statutes adopted in 1960 established a National Congress, and a Central Committee elected by the Congress, as its policy-making bodies. The Congress is ponderous (600 members, meets every 4 years), and the Central Committee in fact governs. More precisely, power is exercised by the Politburo, its steering group. The Central Committee serves as a forum for the discussion of policy, the dissemination of information, and the training of future leaders. Though major decisions appear as Central Committee resolutions, in actuality they originate with the Politburo. The Secretariat of the Central Committee is the principal executive agency of the party, directing subordinate Party organizations in foreign affairs propaganda, organization, inspection (or control), the military establishment, the "reunification" movement, industry and agriculture. The Secretariat also appears to control personnel assignments and promotions in the Party's middle and upper echelons.



# NATIONAL



## ORGANIZATION OF THE LAO DONG PARTY

Source: NIS 43 C, p. 28

The Lao Dong internal organizational principle is "democratic centralism," hierarchical subordination of elected leaders of Party entities formed in all geographic, economic, bureaucratic, social, and cultural groups, wherever at least three Party members exist. Membership in the Party is deliberately confined to an elite, and has never amounted to more than about 3% of the population. 10/

## COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERSHIP

(CIA Estimates)

1931	-	1,500	1950	-	400,000
1946	-	50,000	1962	-	570,000

As of 1963, 80% of the Party were members of 10 years or more, less than 10% were women, and no more than 7% were non-Vietnamese. Although an elite, the Party admitted in 1960 that 85% of its members had no more than 4th grade educations. Lack of skill and drive, as well as inadequate strength, handicapped the Party in its attempts to encadre the DRV's ambitious agricultural and industrial programs. From the 1960 admissions, it appears that of 110,000 managerial personnel in the DRV, only 50,000 or so were Party members; about 10% of the Party is then employed directly in management. Nonetheless, the Party has from all appearances succeeded in lodging itself in pivotal positions in every part of the society, and certainly in the DRV's main undertakings.

### b. Fatherland Front

One of the fundamental procedures of the Vietnamese Communists has been the forming of a "united front" in which Communist Party members join cause with non-Communists, especially nationalist activists. The Party itself has pointed out that this is in proper Leninist fashion:

"The policy of founding the Indochinese democratic front between 1936 and 1939, the Viet Minh front between 1941 and 1951, and the Lien Viet front [1946-1951]; the decision of signing the 6 March 1946...preliminary accord [Ho's accommodation with France]... -- all these are typical examples of the clever application of the...instruction of Lenin." 11/

In 1955 the DRV organized non-Communist elements into "mass organizations," within the "Fatherland Front" (Mat Tran To Quoc). 12/

### SELECTED COMPONENT ORGANIZATIONS OF THE FATHERLAND FRONT

Lao Dong Party  
Democratic Party  
Socialist Party  
General Confederation of Labor  
National Liaison Committee of  
Peasants  
Women's Union  
Youth Federation

Writers and Artists Union  
Journalists Association  
Unified Buddhist Association  
National Liaison Committee of  
Patriotic & Peace Loving Catholics  
Industrialists and Traders Federation  
Peace Committee



The Fatherland Front follows the format of the Lao Dong Party, and Party members occupy the key positions within the Front. The Front composition has not been changed since 1955, but after 1960 it became more active in the "reunification" movement, serving as the proponent, or "externalizing agent" in the DRV for the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. 13/

It should be noted that the Fatherland Front included two nominally non-communist parties, and that it advocated beginning in 1955 an interestingly different scheme for bringing about reunification of Vietnam: two legislative assemblies for North and South, respectively, separate armed forces, and a confederate government. But on all other issues the Front differed not at all from Ho, especially agreeing that: "American imperialism is the chief enemy." 14/ No other deviant view is on record from either the Front or the two "independent" political parties. Moreover, while the DRV government has on rare occasions included Socialist or Democrats, none has ever occupied an important leadership position.

### 3. Leadership

The most remarkable aspect of the DRV and the Lao Dong Party is stability of their leadership. Most of the top leaders of the Party were old-time communists.

	Underground Operation 1945 - 1950	2nd Party Congress February 1951	10th Central Committee Plenum October 1956	3rd Party Congress September 1960
	1945	50 51	56	60
<b>Politburo Members (1960 ranking)</b>				
1. Ho Chi Minh				
2. Le Duc Tho				
3. Truong Chinh				
4. Pham Van Dong				
5. Pham Hung				
6. Vo Nguyen Giap				
7. Le Duc Tho				
8. Nguyen Chi Thanh				
9. Nguyen Tay Trinh				
10. Le Thanh Nghi				
11. Hoang Van Huan				
<b>Alternate Members</b>				
Tran Quoc Hoan				
Von Tien Dung				
<b>Former Members</b>				
Hoang Duc Viet				
Ha Huy Giap				
Ton Duc Thang				
Nguyen Xuan Bang				

MEMBERSHIP IN THE LAO DONG POLITBURO 1951-60

Source: NIS 43 C, p.26

Moreover, this close knit Party elite controlled the levers of power in the DRV government. The following chart shows that as of 1960 all key North Vietnamese leaders -- except one on whose early life U.S. intelligence is not informed -- are known to have been in the ICP in the '30's (or even in predecessor organizations).

# LAO DONG - DRV LEADERSHIP IN 1960 15/

LAO DONG PARTY		DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (DRV)	PEOPLE'S ARMY OF VIETNAM (PAVN)
Politburo (in order of rank, September 1960)	Departmental Responsibility		
Ho Chi Minh *	Chairman, CC	President; Chairman, NDC	Supreme Commander
Le Duan *	First Secretary, Secretariat		
Truong Chinh *		Chairman, National Assembly	
Pham Van Dong *		Premier; Vice Chairman, NDC	
Pham Hung *	Member, Secretariat	Deputy Premier; Chairman, Finance and Trade Board, Premier's Office	
Vo Nguyen Giap *		Deputy Premier; Minister, National Defense; Chairman, NDC	Commander in Chief
Le Duc Tho *	Member, Secretariat Director, Organ- izational Department, CC		
Nguyen Chi Thanh *	Member, Secretariat	Member, NDC	
Nguyen Duy Zinh *		Deputy Premier; Chairman, SPC; Chairman, SSC; Member, NDC	
Le Thanh Nghi *		Deputy Premier; Chairman, SCC; Chairman, Indus- trial Board, Premier's Office	
Huong Van Haan *		Vice Chairman, National Assembly	
ALTERNATE MEMBERS			
Tam Quoc Hoan		Minister, Public Security; Chairman, Home Affairs Board, Premier's Office; Member, NDC	
Wan Tien Dung *		Member, NDC	Chief of Staff

## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CC—Central Committee  
NDC—National Defense Council  
SPC—State Planning Commission

SSC—State Scientific Commission  
SCC—State Construction  
Commission

\* -- ICP pre-WW II

INTERLOCKING OF TOP LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN NORTH  
VIETNAM



From time to time certain members of this elite suffered an apparent eclipse, but Ho Chi Minh ostensibly intervened on their behalf, mediated the dispute in which they were involved, and restored them to the inner circle -- usually in a different position. Thus, Truong Chinh was "fired" as First Secretary of the Party in 1956 after the Land Reform Campaign had been pressed too far and fast, but after a period of absence from the public scene, re-emerged in 1958 as Vice Premier, and became in 1960 Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. Vo Nguyen Giap, who delivered a sharp critique of Truong Chinh in October 1956, disappeared for two months in October 1957, while Ho Chi Minh was on a Bloc trip, amid rumors of a realignment of DRV leadership. Ho's return brought Vo's resurrection. Other examples of this phenomenon attest both to the immutability of the core leaders, and to the centrality of Ho to their position. 16/

A similar testimony to Ho's eminence lies in the murky evidence of factional dispute within the Lao Dong. In 1946 Truong Chinh and Giap appeared to foreign observers as "extremists," urging violence on Ho; in 1956 Truong was the Maoist extremist, Vo a Soviet-style moderate; in 1966, Vo was rated a moderate, but Truong had become a neutral, and reportedly himself had come under fire of "extremist" Le Duan. 17/ Increasingly, Ho has risen above the politics of personalities and intramural clashes, and to the extent that he became involved, seems to have mediated and reconciled rather than disciplined. Demonstrably, his personal leadership qualities kept the DRV elite a cooperative, integrated team, with individual ambitions and hardline-moderate factions delicately in balance.

The larger circle of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong exhibited no different complexion from the inner leadership, except that while most of the Politburo members are considered generalists, the 33 other Central Committee members include Party administrators, State specialists, or military and internal security leaders. More than half of the Central Committee have been identified as ICP members before World War II. 18/ The DRV of 1960, was, then, a state dominated by a coterie or revolutionaries of a particularly hardened breed. Ho himself, in a 1960 speech, paid this tribute to his colleagues:

"I wish to remind you that thirty-one of the comrades who are now in the Central Committee were given altogether 222 years of imprisonment and deportation by the French imperialists before the Revolution, not to mention the sentences to death in absentia and the years of imprisonment evaded by those who escaped from prison....Our comrades made up for the years in prison in discussing and studying political theory. Once more, this not only proves that the enemy's extremely savage policy of repression could not check progress, but on the contrary, it became a touchstone, it has further steeled the revolutionaries. And the result was that the Revolution has triumphed, the imperialists have been defeated...." 19/

## B. The DRV's Domestic Objectives

Ho Chi Minh was always a revolutionary. Whether he was first and foremost a nationalist, or a potential Tito, or the last of the Stalinists--and arguments can be advanced for each theory--as head of state he subscribed to internal programs for the DRV which were communist in concept and Maoist in execution. In repeated statements on the goals of the regime, he and the rest of the Lao Dong leadership made it plain that they were determined to revise radically North Vietnam's land-holding system, and reconstruct its traditional society along egalitarian and collectivist lines. Further, they were determined that North Vietnam would become agriculturally self-sufficient, and industrialized to the degree its natural resources would permit. In fact, the modernization they envisaged for North Vietnam surpassed in degree and urgency any of the My-Diem undertakings in South Vietnam. Yet the latter aroused the peasant's apprehensions, and eventually their hostility. What of Ho Chi Minh's internal security? From the record of DRV policy from 1950 to 1960, it is clear that, while "progress towards socialism" in both the agrarian and industrial realms was always one principal State/Party objective, a well-disciplined society thoroughly submissive to Party leadership was another, and frequently overriding goal.

### 1. Societal Discipline

By no means can it be said that at any time prior to Geneva, Ho and the Lao Dong Party held complete sway in rural North Vietnam. Aside from French supported counter-movements, the Viet Minh leaders had to contend with peasant reluctance to support them, and even outright rejection of their policy. Almost as soon as the DRV "legalized" the Lao Dong Party in 1951, the Party launched a series of land reform schemes which contravened even the popularity Ho et al enjoyed as heroes of the Resistance. Moreover, tensions developed early between the Viet Minh and the Catholics as a group--less apparently over political issues than over traditional Catholic fear of Tonkinese persecution in the absence of French protectors. The Catholics of Tonkin had developed a political and military independence like that of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao in Cochinchina, and resisted the Viet Minh as vigorously as the latter resisted the Saigon regimes. In both land reform and relations with the Catholics, the Party and the DRV encountered stiff opposition.

#### a. Rural Opposition, 1954-1956

Prior to 1954, the Lao Dong Party experimented in Viet Minh liberated areas of Tonkin with a Maoist-style Land Reform Campaign. 20/ Other than the war, Land Reform was the foremost undertaking of the Lao Dong Party after 1951. In essence, the Land Reform Campaign committed the party to an assault on the traditional rural social hierarchy, and to redistribution of land and wealth. Beginning with punitive taxes, the Campaign matured terror, arrests, and public condemnation, trials, and executions. Within the DRV hierarchy, the proponent of Land Reform was Truong Chinh



(born Dang Xuan Khu, party name translating as "Long March"), Secretary General of the Lao Dong Party, who openly espoused the Maoist version of communism, and who relied upon Chinese advisers. Truong Chinh saw land reform as a method of organizing the peasantry under the Lao Dong Party, less important for its economic or social ramifications than for its political and military significance. Truong had warned in 1947 that:

"If we neglect the organization of the people, we cannot mobilize the entire people and the army, and cannot enable them to take part in the resistance in every field. In 1918 Lenin wrote: 'To wage a real war, we must have a strong and well organized rear....' These words constitute very precious counsel for us in this long-term resistance war." 21/

As victory of the Resistance neared, Ho Chi Minh's emphasis on internal reforms, as opposed to martial undertakings, increased. In December 1953, for instance, he stated that:

"The two central tasks in the next years are to do our utmost to fight the enemy and to carry out land reform.... In 1954, we must pay particular attention to three great works:

"To combine land reform with strengthening of the armed forces....

"To combine land reform with the training of cadres and the raising of their ideology....

"To combine land reform with the development of agricultural production...." 22/

Moreover, Ho apparently countenanced harsh measures to carry out both "central tasks." He is reported to have stated his basic strategy to Party cadres in these terms:

"To straighten a curved piece of bamboo, one must bend it in the opposite direction, holding it in that position for awhile. Then, when the hand is removed it will slowly straighten itself." 23/

When the Geneva Conference opened the way to Viet Minh dominion over North Vietnam, and held out the prospect to Tonkinese peasants of migrating to South Vietnam, hundreds of thousands were sufficiently apprehensive over religious persecution, or over "land reform" and other communizing campaigns to the North. There is considerable evidence that many of these fears were well-founded. On the heels of the withdrawing French Expeditionary Forces, Truong Chinh's teams of Chinese advisers toured from village to village to survey for land reforms, and these were followed by an infusion of Lao Dong Party cadres to village level. 24/ People's Courts were activated and the Campaign became the vehicle not only for land redistribution, but for Communist Party penetration into rural society, and a wholesale transformation of

the penetrated community's traditional structure.

U.S. intelligence was not at the time well informed on the ensuing events, but since various sources (chiefly Northern refugees) have filled in a fairly coherent picture. 25/ From the farmers' point of view, the regime's Campaign involved three particularly onerous procedures. The first was an attack upon the position and prerogatives of the traditional village hierarchy, accomplished by the cadre's selecting and training several of the poorest, least successful villagers for a Land Reform Committee and a Special People's Tribunal, and soliciting, from the same sources, accusations against the more prosperous, socially elevated villagers. 26/ The second was the classifying of the entire populace into such lettered categories as "dishonest and ferocious landlords," "average normal landlords"; "rich peasants"; "strong middle level peasants"; or "very poor peasants." 27/ Thirdly, each village Tribunal was then assigned a quota of one landlord death sentence. According to a former Viet Minh, the initial results were displeasing to the "our Chinese comrade advisers," who felt that more "exploiters" should have been found. Accordingly, on orders from the Lao Dong Central Committee, new classifications were assigned which labeled five times the number of landlords. At the same time, the landlord execution quota was raised from one to five per village. 28/

The results of the Campaign were like the outcome of similar procedures in China earlier in the decade: widespread bloodshed. Aside from persons executed on the direct order of the Tribunals themselves, there were countless others who, evicted from their landholds, and ostracized by the community, were condemned to die of starvation. Figures on casualties of the Campaign are inconclusive. George A. Carver states that the killed were "probably on the order of 100,000"; a French professor then in Hanoi estimates that altogether 100,000 were lost; refugees have testified that the countryside of North Vietnam was white with the clothing of mourning; Bernard Fall believed that 50,000 to 100,000 were killed. 29/ That there were significant excesses is evident from the behavior of the DRV itself, which beginning in August 1956, moved publicly to restrain Party cadres, to curb the power of the local courts, and to dampen the ardor of the "poor" peasants.

In August, 1956, Ho admitted that "errors had been committed in realizing the unity of the peasants" and promised to redress wrongful classifications and judgments by Land Reform Committees. 30/ At the 10th Plenum of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee on 29 October 1956, Truong Chinh was replaced by Ho Chi Minh himself as Party Secretary, and the top levels of the Central Land Reform Committee and the Ministry of Agriculture were shaken up. 31/ Vo Nguyen Giap, as the Party's spokesman, read a list of errors considered in these changes:

"(a) While carrying out their anti-feudal task, our cadres... have separated the Land Reform and the Revolution. Worst of all, in some areas they have even made the two mutually exclusive.



"(b) We have failed to realize the necessity of uniting with the middle-level peasants, and we should have concluded some form of alliance with the rich peasants, whom we treated in the same manner as the landlords.

"(c) We attacked the landowning families indiscriminately....

"(d) We made too many deviations and executed too many honest people. We attacked on too large a front and, seeing enemies everywhere, resorted to terror, which became far too widespread.

"(e) Whilst carrying out our Land Reform program we failed to respect the principles of freedom of faith and worship in many areas.

"(f) In regions inhabited by minority tribes we have attacked tribal chiefs too strongly, thus injuring, instead of respecting, local customs and manners.

"(g) When reorganizing the party, we paid too much importance to the notion of social class instead of adhering firmly to political qualifications alone. Instead of recognizing education to be the first essential, we resorted exclusively to organizational measures such as disciplinary punishments, expulsion from the party, executions, dissolution of party branches and cells. Worse still, torture came to be regarded as a normal practice during party reorganization." 32/

On 2 November, the DRV announced that its first postwar elections would be held in 1957, and formed a constitutional reform committee as one of several measures aimed at greater freedom in the society.

On 8 November, Ho abolished the detested Special People's Tribunals, and ordered the wholesale release of prisoners from the regime's detention centers. There followed then a systematic, government-wide "Campaign for the Rectification of Errors." Notwithstanding these admissions, or perhaps because of them, violence broke out in Nghe An, the province of Ho's birth.

#### b. Peasant Rebellion of 1956

The year 1956 had been a bad one for communist regimes. Obedient to the dictates of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, most communist governments, including the DRV, had launched programs of de-Stalinization and liberalization. In China these took the form of the "Hundred Flowers" movement, and in the DRV, the "Rectification of Errors Campaign." Poland and East Germany, as well as Hungary had experienced violence. Nonetheless, it was with some surprise that the world received Hanoi Radio's announcement of 16 November 1956,

of riots which:

"Broke out when a gang of reactionaries, taking advantage of the mistakes committed during the political implementation of land reform, molested soldiers and cadres of the people's regime, seized quantities of arms and blocked traffic. Many dead and wounded are reported among the soldiers and cadre.... Drastic measures have been taken to maintain security.... Regional administrative committees have intensified efforts to correct mistakes committed in the agrarian reform program, and are now satisfying the legitimate aspirations of all compatriots, including the Catholics...." 33/

On 17 November, however, Hanoi disclosed that "troops and cadres....tried to reason with the people but were man-handled. This ended in a clash in which a few persons were killed and wounded, including some army men....Security services are now taking the necessary steps to maintain order and security and to protect the compatriots' lives and property...." 34/ On 21 November, Han Dan, the government newspaper, noted that: "Nghe An is the province in which party organizations existed as early as 1930. But it is in the same province that the most serious mistakes have been made....," and went on to deplore the execution and beatings of party members. 35/

What happened indicates that the populace of North Vietnam must have been living at the time under severe tension. The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) had been deployed in strength into the rural areas to support the Land Reform Campaign, and it was reportedly through PAVN channels that the DRV first learned of impending revolt. Local garrisons had been reinforced as citizens grew more restive, and units composed of regrouped southerners were sent into exceptionally tense areas.

On November 9, 1956, several hundred aggrieved peasants assembled in a market place near Vinh--a predominantly Catholic area--to petition an ICC team to arrange for some of them to migrate to South Vietnam, and for return of confiscated land to others. The following morning a special DRV propaganda team and a contingent of NVA troops arrived, and several arrests were attempted. A riot ensued, which spread into insurrection. On the night of 13 November PAVN troops stormed into the town, scattering the rebels and inflicting heavy casualties. Thousands of peasants then swarmed over their local government offices, destroying land records, and blocking roads. Some militia deserted and joined the rebels, and attacks on nearby DRV troops were attempted. Bernard Fall, in a 1957 article, described four columns of some 10,000 peasants marching in the province capital, seizing arms from troops, and forcing party cadres to sign confessions of crimes. 36/ Two reinforced army divisions, some 20,000 strong, were committed to put down the uprising. 37/

The casualties resulting from the revolt are not known. Fall states that "close to 6000 farmers were deported or executed." 38/ Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon cited "massacres" in the North, claimed to have



evidence that the entire population of Nghe An had remained ignorant of its right to move to the South in 1954-1955, and called upon the ICC to reinstate Article 14(d). 39/ Vietnam Press, Diem's official press agency, on 9 November 1956, quoted Cong Nhan, a Saigon daily as follows:

"In the North, the fall of the illegitimate regime is near....As soon as the people's hatred of the Communist dictatorship is sufficiently mature for it to succeed in overthrowing it, then general elections which are really free will take place in the whole of Vietnam, and will peacefully bring about the reunification of the country.

"If he refuses to have recourse to force in order to liberate the North, while yet realizing the dearest aspirations of the people, the supreme head of the Republic of Vietnam does so solely in order to avoid bloodshed and undesirable fratricidal strife." 40/

c. Reconciliation and Repression, 1957-1959

From the DRV viewpoint the Nghe-An uprising, whatever its dimensions, coincided fortuitously with the Suez and Hungarian crises. The GVN simply could not muster sufficient evidence to compete for headlines, and U.S. attention was on Europe. In any event, Ho and his regime undertook a series of conciliatory gestures which sapped popular resentment, and occluded the situation abroad. Conciliatory gestures were quickly extended to Catholics. Radio Hanoi, which in July 1955, had broadcast a Lao Dong proclamation rejecting the existence of deities consistent with the "scientific principles of the doctrine of Marx and Lenin," on 22 November 1956 announced that:

"...in the agrarian reform, we have committed errors, including errors in the observance of freedom of religion. The people in general, and the Catholic citizens in particular, want these errors corrected. These are legitimate demands." 41/

At the same time the government allocated about 48 million dong (about \$15,000) for repair of Catholic churches and a seminary. 42/ On 15-16 December 1956, the DRV convened the National Committee of the Catholic Union, which issued a declaration criticizing the government for having violated the laws on religious freedom, pointing out that:

"...the errors committed during the agrarian reform have violated the policy of religious liberty of the Lao Dong Party and of the Government and have infringed on the religious rights of the faithful...." 43/

Ho Chi Minh personally received a delegation from the Committee of the Catholic Union to express his regret over the "errors" that had been committed, and Nhan Dan, the Lao Dong paper, published a series of articles on the same subject.

The Lao Dong Party itself was purged with particular attention to the demonstrably unreliable rural membership acquired during the latter stages of Land Reform, and Nhan Dan through the spring of 1957 reported on continuing difficulty in restoring the Party's rapport in the countryside. At the same time, the press carried a number of graphic accounts of life in DRV prison camps. 44/

In early 1957, in emulation of Mao, the DRV sponsored a "hundred flowers" campaign, and as in China, the regime was surprised by the sharpness of intellectual criticism which it evoked. 45/ The Hundred Flowers movement lasted in full bloom only about three months, but the literary license stimulated an unusual outflow of verse and fable, in which Land Reform, PAVN, foreign advisers, and the Party cadre were all criticized. Eventually the barbs became unbearable for the Lao Dong, and the flow of newsprint to opposition papers was cut, printers went on strike, and a particularly cutting journal, Nhan-Van ("Humanism," a pun on Nhan-Dan), was forbidden to publish. Arrests and trials followed and by mid-1957 the voice of the intellectuals had all but been stilled. Nevertheless, as late as 1960, official releases were still deprecating literature which did not meet regime criteria for "proletarian writings."

By mid 1957, the DRV had reversed its policy on Catholics--six months after the "Rectification" rapprochement of December 1956. The denunciation of priests was resumed, and the Church was accused of political activities. In 1959, a more intense campaign of harassment was undertaken, including newspaper barrages depicting the Catholic clergy as the greatest obstacle to collectives in farm regions. Church activity was severely restricted; all non-Vietnamese priests and nuns were expelled; and the movement of the native clergy was rigidly circumscribed. Catholic schools closed rather than accept DRV political instructors. Western observers in Hanoi in 1962 noted that congregations in Hanoi were composed invariably of the aged. Fall reported that as of that year there were but 5 bishops and 320 priests remaining in the DRV. 46/

The DRV, like the GVN, also resorted to population relocations: the forced migration of Vietnamese from overcrowded, potentially dissident coastal regions into areas inhabited by minority peoples. The tribal people of North Vietnam comprised about 15% of the population thinly settled over about 40% of the country. 47/ These folk had always resisted government from outside their tribal society. The French made only a pretense of governing them. Racially differentiated from the Vietnamese, the highlander-lowlander relationship historically proceeded from hostility on the one hand and contempt on the other. Even Truong Chinh was unwilling to press strongly his Land Reform Campaign against the patriarchal tribal system, but to the extent that he did, violence ensued. In Vo Nguyen Giap's catalog of mistakes recited on 29 October 1956 (supra), these difficulties were admitted, and concessions to the minorities were part of the Rectification of Errors. The Constitution of 1960 guaranteed the preservation of minority languages and cultures, and autonomy for local government. More than 70% of public administration in the northeast border region was placed



in the hands of non-Vietnamese, and the proportion was almost 50% on the Laotian frontier. Minority leaders were given seats in the National Assembly and on the Lao Dong Party Central Committee, and in both the Party and government bureaucracies numerous special minority boards and commissions were formed. Nonetheless, the first DRV Five-Year Plan (1960) included an expanded agricultural resettlement program in which 1,000,000 Vietnamese farmers were to move from the delta into the tribal regions to open new farmlands. In fact, the new farms were seldom self-sufficient, much less a contribution to the national food supply. But they aided internal security: their presence debilitated the traditional tribal society, and provided a quasi-military presence on the borders. In 1959, security forces in the border regions were further strengthened with Armed Public Security Forces to counter alleged airdrops of "ranger spies" from South Vietnam.

In most respects, the DRV had gone further in its self-accusation than had the de-Stalinization campaigns in other communist countries. Its recovery was equally exaggerated. Hoang Van Chi, a former Viet Minh cadre, believes that the Land Reform's advance into mass terror, followed by "Rectification" and reconciliation, had been carefully calculated by Ho as a "bamboo bending" in deliberate emulation of the Chinese, and that Ho, no less than Mao, was fully aware that bloodshed would eventuate. <sup>48/</sup> Aiming ultimately at nothing less than a rapid and total transformation of traditional society, both leaders resorted to terror, followed by calculated relaxation and retightening of government control, as necessary steps to a disciplined populace. If such was in fact Ho's views, events bore him out, for by 1959 the DRV was able to resume a forced advance toward collectivization of agriculture, which, though afflicted with occasional administrative setbacks and by production decreases, did not again prompt revolt. <sup>49/</sup>

Other internal security measures taken by the DRV included strict controls over personal mobility, the allocation of large manpower resources to internal security functions, and the employment of the Lao Dong Party as a control mechanism and security censor. The regime eventually acquired, through its duplicate Party and governmental bureaucracies, contacts with and control over virtually every citizen. The formal internal security apparatus was effectively supplemented by population control documentation (identification cards, licenses, travel permits), by incessant propaganda, by networks of informers, and by surveillance in compulsory mass organizations. By 1959, following 5 years of oppression, relaxation, and repression, the people of the DRV were effectively disciplined.

## 2. Progress Towards Socialism

The assertion of the DRV Constitution of 1960 that the nation was "transforming its backward economy into a socialist economy with modern industry and agriculture..." had substance, but entailed a substantial input from abroad. Though a primarily agricultural society,

North Vietnam emerged from its war with France in 1954 a food-deficit area. Densely populated, war-torn, it found itself more than customarily dependent upon outside supplies of rice and supplemental foods, which it had usually imported from South Vietnam. Soviet stop-gap aid filled the food deficit until DRV production was improved. The negative attitude of the GVN toward any economic relations with the DRV beyond those necessitated by the Geneva regroupment, in which Diem became progressively more adamant, created one pressure upon the DRV to seek dependable sources of further aid abroad. A second stemmed from lack of human and material capital to take advantage of its natural resources: the North contained all the developed mineral lodes and most of the established manufacturing in the two Vietnams, as well as the bulk of electric power capacity in Indochina. 50/ The DRV needed substantial foreign aid either to press toward modernizing its basic industry or to collectivize its farms.

#### a. Agriculture

Foreign aid to the DRV in agriculture, aside from relief shipments of food, took the form chiefly of technical assistance, both in management and technique. 51/ Chinese experts in Maoist land reforms figured prominently in the concept and direction of the collectivization drives. Russian advisors are believed to have advocated DRV concentration on mineral and tropical products valuable in communist international trade, and to have furnished methodological assistance in irrigation, fertilizing, and the like, but to little avail: labor intensive, hand tool farming in the traditional fashion persisted. Progress towards collectivization was perceptible. After retrenching in 1957 following the peasant flare-up, the regime moved ahead, although more cautiously. At the beginning of 1958, less than 5% of the farm population was in producer cooperatives; enrollments increased thereafter, and sharply in 1960, from about 55% of peasant households in July to about 85% in December. About one third of the collectives were in advanced stages of communal land ownership and shared production; the remainder represented inchoate socialization, with market incentive still a mainstay. Performance in agriculture was generally poor, output never rising above subsistence levels, and slow and erratic growth depressing progress in other sectors of the economy.

There was, however, perceptible progress:

#### Food Grain Per Capita 52/ (in Kilograms)

<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1962</u>
260	310	283	315	358	304	337	339

The DRV gross national product, owing to improvements in both the industrial and agricultural sectors, grew steadily some 6% per year after 1958. The most promising years for the DRV were 1958 and 1959, when performance in both sectors was extraordinarily good; thereafter, consecutive years of poor harvests and rapid population increases cut into gains.



b. Industry

In industry, as compared with agriculture, foreign aid was more relevant, and visibly more effective. The DRV claimed in 1963 that new capacity had raised the total value of factory and handicraft industrial output two and two-thirds times above the 1956 level; an average annual increase of some 20%. Socialization was pronounced: by 1963 state-owned enterprises accounted for 60% of production, and partially state-owned about 6%. The North Vietnamese themselves possessed at the outset little capacity to carry out a balanced program of industrial development; in fact, handicapped as the DRV was by annual fluctuations in their agriculturally based economy and shortages of native technicians, its capability to absorb foreign aid was distinctly limited. Initially, to restore existing industrial plant, to improve communications, and to import consumer goods. Thereafter aid was extended in the form of credits for specified projects. The first DRV long range development plan, a three year program in 1958, proved too ambitious; targets were revised down annually, and at the end of the plan agricultural growth had averaged a little over 4%, compared with 21% for industry. A Five Year Plan for 1960-1965 was designed for more "rational development" of heavy industry, but precisely how this was to be achieved, and the pace of improvement, apparently remained subjects of contention up until the exigencies of the war overtook the plan.

U.S. intelligence is not informed as to how precisely foreign aid was related to either DRV economic plans, but in terms of government budget revenues, the DRV reported that foreign aid and loans comprised 39.5% of its 1955 income, but dropped to only 15.7% of its 1960 income. By contrast, and as a measure of return on both foreign aid and its own investment, profits from state enterprises contributed only 6.5% to 1955 income, compared with 58.0% in 1960. Total aid for 1955 to 1963 was as follows:

ECONOMIC AID TO DRV

1955-1963

(In Millions of U.S. Dollars) 53/

<u>Donor</u> (1)	<u>Grants</u>	<u>Credits</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>% Total</u>
Communist China	225.0	232.0	457.0	47.8
USSR	105.0	263.9	368.9 (2)	38.6
Rumania	4.8	37.5		
Poland	7.5	14.5	97.0 (3)	10.1
Czechoslovakia	9.0	7.5		
East Germany	15.0	0	15.0	1.6
Hungary	2.0	10.0	12.0	1.2
Bulgaria	4.0	2.5	6.5	0.7
Total	372.3	584.1 (3)	956.4	100.0

(1) Albania and North Korea also aided, insignificantly.

(2) Does not include 1962 agreement for agricultural development assistance, value unknown.

(3) Includes \$16.2 million extended in 1955 as a consortium.

U.S. intelligence estimated that through 1963 DRV used about \$334 million of aid extended by China, \$324 million from the USSR, and about \$106 from East Europe.

The Chinese Communists played a leading role in assistance for transportation, communication, and the irrigation system. Between 1957 and 1964 they built 14 rice mills, 28 sugar refineries, plus a number of consumer goods factories. A 1959 loan financed expansion in metallurgy, chemicals, and electric power. Chinese trainers, advisers, and technicians averaged 1500 to 3000 per annum. Soviet aid was at first centered on heavy industry. Technicians -- about 150 to 300 persons yearly -- were concentrated in heavy manufacturing, mining and electric power. After 1960, Soviet assistance was also provided for telecommunications and agriculture.

The DRV's foreign trade tripled from 1955 to 1963, and although exports increased from 8% of total trade in 1955, to 37% in 1963, a deficit remained which had to be financed from aid -- from grants in 1955-1957, and from credit thereafter.

The pattern of trade was also Bloc oriented, as follows:

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF DRV TRADE

(1962 Data in Percentages) 54/

	<u>Imports</u>	<u>Exports</u>
Communist China, N.K., Cuba.	38.6	23.2
Eastern Europe	16.7	23.5
USSR	36.6	33.8
Japan	2.3	11.1
Other Non-Communist	<u>5.8</u>	<u>8.4</u>
Total	100.0	100.0

Together China and USSR accounted for two-thirds of all trade. Total exports were 60% from agriculture, forestry, fishing and handicrafts, 30% from minerals; 50% of imports were machines and allied equipment. Less than 15% of all trade was with non-communist nations, consisting mainly of manufactured goods and chemicals for DRV coal.

Again, 1959 and 1960 were banner years. Compared with 1955, total trade more than doubled by 1959, and nearly tripled by 1960:



Value of DRV Foreign Trade \*

(Millions of U.S. Dollars) 55/

	<u>Total Trade</u>	<u>Imports</u>	<u>Exports</u>
1955.....	80.4	73.6	6.8
1956.....	99.0	78.6	20.4
1957.....	140.5	99.5	41.0
1958.....	114.5	63.3	51.2
1959.....	171.8	104.5	67.3
1960.....	207.8	127.9	79.9
1961.....	224.2	143.7	80.5
1962.....	238.8	149.4	89.4

\* Derived from DRV data. Total imports are believed to include all goods imported into the country except grant military assistance materiel.

Ho was explicit in spurning Western assistance for DRV development. In September, 1955, he extolled aid from the "other democracies" and pointed out that:

"This selfless and unconditional aid, beneficial to the people, is completely different from the 'aid' conceived by the imperialists. Through their 'aid' the imperialists always aim at exploiting and enslaving the peoples. The Marshall Plan, which has gradually encroached upon the sovereignty of the recipient countries, is eloquent proof of this." 56/

C. Foreign Policy Objectives

In the aftermath of the Geneva Settlement of 1954, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam pursued beyond its borders national objectives which inevitably drew the DRV into a broader, more direct role in the southern insurgency, and, therefore, into conflict with the United States. The following examination of DRV national interests -- perforce speculative -- probes maximum and minimum objectives to delimit the range of DRV choice, and to determine the approximate apparent timing of those major foreign policy decisions which took it southward.

1. Independence

From the outset, Doc Lap, Independence, had been the battle-cry of Vietnamese of the Resistance, much as "liberty" rings for Americans. For Ho Chi Minh it was sine qua non: in 1946, he told a U.S. writer that "What follows will follow, independence must come first." 57/ Independence of Vietnam from foreign domination -- from colonialism in its political forms, its economic exploitation, its military occupation, its social subservience and racism -- has been the primary goal of the redoubtable

revolutionary's entire mature life. 58/ His main obstacles, as he saw them, were first France, then a Franco-American combine, and finally the U.S. alone; toward the expulsion of U.S. power and influence from Vietnam Ho, after 1954, directed most of the international power of the DRV. 59/ Nonetheless, while Ho's testimony is extensive on his deep antipathy to U.S. imperialism as the major danger to the DRV, his behavior in the Chinese-Russian rivalry indicated that he perceived yet another serious threat to Vietnamese independence in his northern neighbor: China, ancient overlord of the Viet peoples. 60/ Accordingly, the foreign policy of the DRV, though pivoted upon anti-Americanism, has guarded against encroachment by the Communist Chinese.

As an upper limit on reasonable expectations after 1954, the DRV might have hoped, in the context of a worsening political climate within South Vietnam, or of some form of plebescite per the Geneva Settlement, that foreign military forces would be withdrawn from the South and foreign influence attenuated. A Franco-American withdrawal could have acceptably taken place under a neutralization formula, provided that the formula permitted pursuit of other DRV policies, such as reunification, and socialization.

Minimally, the DRV might have been willing to accept a continued foreign presence in the south, especially a French presence, with assurance of eventual withdrawal, and compensatory concessions to the DRV on the issue of reunification.

In the literal sense, the DRV won its independence at the Geneva Conference of 1954, as attested by Pravda upon the close of the Conference, July 22, 1954: "the freedom-loving peoples of Indo-China...have won their national independence." In January, 1957, the Soviet UN delegate requested entry of the DRV into the UN as a separate, distinct state, as it then existed in North Vietnam. 61/ But Ho Chi Minh, also on 22 July 1954, issued an appeal stressing the temporary nature of the partition, and the impermanence of the French military presence in the South. Moreover, he said: "North, Central and South Vietnam are territories of ours. Our country will certainly be unified, our entire people will surely be liberated." 62/ By 1957 the bar to independence and unification, the baleful foreign presence in Vietnam was plainly, in Ho's view, the US:

"The Vietnamese people have perseveringly carried on the struggle for the implementation of the Geneva Agreement to reunify the country, because South Viet-Nam is still ruled by the US imperialists and their henchmen. In completely liberated North Viet-Nam, power is in the hands of the people; this is a firm basis for the peaceful reunification of Viet-Nam, a task which receives ever-growing and generous help from the Soviet Union, China, and other brother countries. Thanks to this assistance, the consolidation of the North has scored good results." 63/



## 2. Reunification

The goal of independence, because of American "imperialist" support of the Diem government, thus became closely allied with, if not inseparable from, that of reunification. But the DRV-Lao Dong leaders, though widely acknowledged by all Vietnamese as heroes in the struggle for independence, did not win similar acceptance as political spokesmen for Cochinchina or Annam. Indeed, in all the modern history of Vietnam there has been little real unity. Vietnam's record is, rather, one of violence and political division. The conquest of Vietnam's current territory by the Dai-Viet people of the Red River Delta (modern Tonkin) from the Cham (of modern Annam) and Khmers (of modern Cochinchina) took place throughout this millenium; the Mekong Delta did not come under Viet suzerainty until ca 1780. In the meantime, civil war had fractioned the Dai-Viet: for 150 years (ca. 1640-1790) two high walls divided North from South Vietnam at approximately the 17th parallel. A unified Vietnam came into being in 1802 under the Emperor Gia Long, but scarcely half a century elapsed before the French conquests began. Under the French, Cochinchina, Annam, and Tonkin were politically separate. 64/

Present-day South Vietnam--by Viet Minh terms, Zone V (Annam) and VI (Cochinchina or Nam Bo)--has always been of secondary importance to the DRV. Ho Chi Minh's government can claim to have ruled Saigon, for example, for only twenty days in September, 1945, and neither the DRV government nor the Lao Dong Party ever commanded the strength in South Vietnam that they did in Tonkin.. During the War of Resistance, 1945-1954, Zone V was less a theater of operations than a source of supplies and recruits for the Viet Minh in Tonkin, and in both Zone V and Nam Bo the Viet Minh practiced economy of force: only some 20% of organized Viet Minh military units were in either at end 1953, even though the areas supported nearly half of all Vietnam's population. Douglas Pike's study of the Viet Cong led him to conclude that:

"The Cochinchinese regarded the resistance as Northern-oriented: the center of fighting was in the North, the Vietminh was strongest in the North, most of its leaders were Northerners, and the French were most vulnerable in the Red River delta. The South had less tradition of revolution, and inevitably a variety of North-South policy conflicts arose. The communication channel between Hanoi and Saigon was undependable, and liaison within the South was difficult. The Northern leadership exhibited little knowledge about southerners and even less patience with Southern lethargy...." 65/

Even Ho Chi Minh was fairly explicit in assigning to South Vietnam a lesser role in the revolution. For example, in his December, 1953, address to the National Assembly on Land Reform, he was careful to point out that Zones V and VI were not yet ripe for "progress toward socialism":

"Land reform is a policy applied throughout the country, but it must be carried out step by step; first in localities where sufficient conditions have been obtained and then in other localities....

"The Government will deal with the regions inhabited by the national minorities, the Fifth Zone, South Viet-Nam, and the guerrilla bases later on. In guerrilla--and enemy--occupied areas, land reform will be carried out after their liberation." 66/

Nonetheless, though South Vietnam had been relegated to a low operational priority, its eventual unification with the DRV became an article of faith which the Lao Dong leaders repeatedly and solemnly affirmed; for example, Ho Chi Minh:

"Our compatriots in the Southern area are citizens of Vietnam. Rivers can dry up and mountains wear away, but this truth stands.' [Letter to Southerners, May 3, 1946.] 'Each day the Fatherland remains disunited, each day you [of the South] suffer, food is without taste, sleep brings no rest. I solemnly promise you, through your determination, the determination of all our people, the Southern land will return to the bosom of the Fatherland.' [October 23, 1946.] 'National reunification is our road to life. Great unity is the power that will surely triumph. Thanks to this great unity, the Revolution was successful and the Resistance victorious. Now, with great unity, our political struggle will certainly be victorious, our country will certainly be reunified.' [July 5, 1956.] 'South Vietnam is our flesh and blood....Vietnam is one country. South and North are of the same family, and no reactionary force can partition it. Vietnam must be reunited.' [September 2, 1957.] 'Every hour, every minute, the people of the North think of their compatriots in the South. The South Vietnamese people relentlessly have fought for nearly twenty years, first the French colonialists, then the American-Diemists. They are indeed the heroic sons and daughters of the heroic Vietnamese nation. South Vietnam truly deserves the same: Brass Citadel of the Fatherland.' [May 9, 1963.]"

After the Geneva Conference of 1954, the most Ho and the DRV leaders might have expected was that France and the U.S. would permit a plebescite to occur, or withdraw under some one of the formulae mentioned above, with reunification to follow. However, for reasons which shall be set forth below, the actual course of events forced them to adopt what they probably regarded as a minimally acceptable policy, as follows: 68/

-- Consolidate power in North Vietnam, and expect the South to collapse from internal dissension.



- Expect general elections, but in prudence, anticipate their not being held, and prepare to take the South by force if necessary.
- Move north the bulk of the Viet Minh forces in the South, and upgrade as a reserve.
- Foster strong ties among the regroupees with families in the South.
- Establish an effective political infrastructure in the South, and work to weaken the government as well as the position of foreign powers there.

In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem, with patent U.S. backing, refused to open consultations with the DRV preliminary to the expected plebescite. There followed in rapid succession Diem's own plebescite, the casting off of Bao Dai, and the withdrawal of the French. When July, 1956, passed, hope that the Geneva Settlement might lead toward reunification waned in the North. It was thereafter increasingly clear that peaceable reunification was not in prospect for the foreseeable future. Ho Chi Minh, in a 1956 letter to the 90,000 to 130,000 regroupees who had gone North in the expectation of returning that year, explained the seeming inaction of the DRV on their behalf as follows:

"Our policy is: to consolidate the North and to keep in mind the South.

"To build a good house, we must build a strong foundation. To have a vigorous plant with green leaves, beautiful flowers, and good fruit, we must take care of it and feed the root.

"The North is the foundation, the root of the struggle for complete national liberation and the reunification of the country. That is why everything we are doing in the North is aimed at strengthening both the North and the South. Therefore, to work here is the same as struggling in the South: it is to struggle for the South and for the whole of Viet-Nam.

"Struggle is always accompanied by difficulties. But your difficulties are our common difficulties. After fifteen years of devastating war, the newly liberated North is suffering many privations....

"...our political struggle will...be a long and hard struggle, then the tendency to become impatient, pessimistic, and to succumb to other cares will disappear.

"The political struggle will certainly be victorious, national reunification will certainly be achieved." 69/

After the internal turmoil of 1956-1957, the DRV's domestic decks were cleared for more direct action abroad. Internal dissension died down as the regime effectively suppressed or mollified the farmers and the Catholics, the epicenters of discontent. Also, privations afflicting the society stemming from the war and the regroupment were somewhat alleviated.

### 3. Support from Abroad

The DRV, within its own resources, probably could not have achieved or maintained its independence, and it certainly could not look for reunification without foreign support. During the period 1950-1954, the Viet Minh had accepted significant amounts of foreign aid, especially Chinese aid, 70/ and the Geneva Agreements were in large measure the product of the diplomacy of the Soviet Union and the Chinese People's Republic, rather than their Vietnamese allies. 71/ The DRV, as it emerged from Geneva in 1954, consisted of a society torn by the war and undergoing the trauma of a 900,000 person exodus, a food deficit, a modest and war-damaged industrial plant, and a drastic shortage of technicians and public administrators. Internal and external defense were almost immediately a principal policy aim -- certainly through the 1956 peasant rebellions, and their consequences. Whatever extraterritorial ambitions the DRV may have had, these were necessarily subordinate to survival as a state. In the view of the Lao Dong leaders, apparently even the realization of even that minimal goal hinged upon the DRV's receiving substantial military assistance from abroad. 72/ Additional foreign aid dependency stemming from the broad domestic reform programs which the DRV undertook -- discussed above -- further impelled Ho Chi Minh and his government to turn to the Chinese and the Russians. The DRV's dependence upon its communist allies increased markedly over the decade following Geneva.

#### a. Foreign Military Assistance

The DRV had sound reason to maintain a large military establishment in the aftermath of Geneva. The presence of the French forces in South Vietnam through 1956, and the US-aided GVN military forces thereafter, taken together with the GVN's claims to DRV territory and people, GVN diplomatic hostility, and GVN belligerent propaganda, probably justified a large army for national defense. 73/ Moreover, internal security placed heavy demands upon DRV forces, at first to deal with the exigencies of establishing DRV control, pushing the Land Reform Campaign, and coping with the refugee problem. Large forces were also needed in 1956 to suppress uprisings, particularly in the predominantly Catholic rural areas. 74/ Beyond simply security, however, in orthodox communist fashion, the DRV regarded the armed forces as a primary instrument for indoctrination of the masses and for support of other Lao Dong Party programs; they also served as a reserve labor force to meet agricultural crises. 75/ And the foreign policy of the DRV required a military instrument of extensive capabilities in insurgency operations -- subversion, infiltration, and guerrilla warfare.



Manpower for such an establishment was available, although in poor crop years, diversion was necessary. But equipment was in short supply, and extensive training was in order. Most military equipment and supplies had to be imported, as DRV industry was incapable of more than small scale production of rudimentary small arms, small arms ammunition, and simple impedimenta, such as uniforms. 76/ Accordingly, virtually from the moment of its independence, the DRV sought and obtained military materiel from abroad, risking being caught at contravention of Article 17 of the Geneva Agreement to build a large, modernized land army of 10-14 divisions. 77/

b. Solidarity with the USSR and CPR

But military assistance and economic aid were conditioned on the quid pro quo of DRV identification with and support for the "Communist Bloc." The price of Bloc support had been high; it included sacrificing French cooperation after Geneva. 78/ In subordinating its interests to those of the USSR and CPR at Geneva, the DRV impaired its own negotiating strength. Thereafter, similar subordination obstructed its attempts to achieve reunification. It was with France that the DRV had contracted to hold elections on reunification, and it tried after 1954 to pursue a policy calculated to encourage France's honoring its Geneva commitments. Moreover, the DRV, short of human and material capital, wished to maintain access to French economic resources. Pham Van Dong assured the French in January, 1955, that the DRV:

"....sincerely desires to establish economic relations with France for reasons which are both political and economic.... That does not prevent us from establishing relations with friendly countries like China, but we are used to working with the French and can continue to do so on a basis of equality and reciprocity." 79/

But Paris was faced, as Pham put it, with a choice between Washington and Hanoi, though he assured the French that "the unity of Viet Nam will be achieved in any case, with France or against France." The French opted for withdrawal in 1956: the price of protracted intimacy with a solidly Bloc nation proved too high for France, both in its internal politics and in the Western alliance. 80/

For the DRV, solidarity with the Bloc entailed costs beyond French cooperation, for by the test of deeds, neither the Soviets nor the Chinese firmly supported its quest for reunification. It was the DRV's fate that the historically invincible monolith with which it cast its fortunes in 1950 was, by 1957, definitely disintegrating. Soviet policy vis a vis Vietnam had always been subordinated to its European interests. This was evident as early as 1945, when the success of Ho and the ICP were accorded less importance than success of the French

Communist Party, and in 1954 it appeared that France, by rejecting the European Defense Community bought Soviet cooperation in settling the Indochina War--at the DRV's expense. 81/ Post Geneva, Soviet support of the DRV came into tension with its strivings toward detente with the U.S. Generally, the Soviets seemed willing to accept the Cold War line SEATO drew at the 17th parallel, and were quite cool to DRV "reunification" talk. But the most disruptive factor in Moscow-Hanoi relations after Geneva was not Washington, but Peking. The CPR, like the USSR, seems to have regarded the DRV as a pawn in a world-wide test of power. The Chinese would probably have been disinterested in having on its southern border a unified, strong Vietnam, even though it were communist. They seem to have always regarded support of the DRV as a way to embarrass the Soviets, to attack the U.S. position in Southeast Asia, and to frustrate the US-USSR detente. Nonetheless, the Chinese had earned high regard in the DRV because they were willing, as the Soviets were not, to succor Ho with military aid in his hour of need. Moreover, Mao's form of revolution seemed far more relevant to the Lao Dong leaders than the Russian version. Proximity thus reinforced the attraction of China both as a source of aid and as a socialist model, and offset much traditional Viet-Chinese antipathy. However, like the Soviets, the Chinese maneuvered in Vietnam for broader goals than DRV success. In 1954 and 1955, possibly seeking to encourage an American withdrawal from the Taiwan Straits, the CPR adopted a soft line which blurred their stance on Vietnam just as the Geneva elections came into view. 82/ In 1956, Khrushchev's depiction of Stalin's monstrous leadership at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union called into doubt the validity of Soviet pre-eminence within the Bloc. Mao's bids for Stalin's former position then split the Bloc.

Ho's isolation was borne home to him within the year after Geneva, as the deadline approached for consultations preliminary to the elections. Although the Soviet Ambassador to Hanoi had joined a chorus of dark threats from DRV representatives that "violent action" would follow if the consultations were delayed, the 20 July 1955 deadline passed while the parties to the Agreement were in the Summit Conference at Geneva on ways to decrease world tensions, and the Bloc did not press the point. Ho took the extraordinary step of a formal appeal to Diem, but the GVN on 7 August 1955 strongly rejected Hanoi's overtures for talks. 83/ A subsequent DRV appeal to the UK and USSR co-presidents of the Geneva Conference was also of no avail. In January, 1956, China, and then the USSR, did request another Geneva conference; but the USSR and the UK responded only by extending sine die the functions of the International Control Commission beyond the expiration date. 84/

All indications are that Ho preferred to follow the Soviet lead, probably from both repugnance at the prospect of further dependency on China, and realization that the Soviet was in a better position to provide the kinds and amount of foreign aid and trade the DRV



required. 85/ From 1956 through 1960 Ho, at some cost, honored the principle Mao intoned at the Communist summit meeting in Moscow in November, 1957: the Communist bloc must have a head and the Soviet Union must be that head. 86/ Soviet rebuffs of the DRV must have therefore been particularly painful for Ho. In the 9th Plenum of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee (19-24 April 1956) Ho--who was in person the DRV's prime political asset, especially in view of Diem's ascendancy--dutifully recited the de-Stalinizing cant of the 20th Congress of the CPSU extolling collective leadership, and damning the evil cult of the individual. 87/ Two weeks later, as the outcome of the meeting of Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference at which the Soviets tacitly accepted status quo in Vietnam, Ho received a message, dated 8 May 1956, signed by A. Gromyko, First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, acting with the authority of his government, addressed to two sovereign states: the Governments of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam. 88/ Immediately after the deadline for elections passed, in August 1956, Ho penned a Pravda article deprecating notions that the DRV reunification "struggle" was a Vietnamese affair, denying that the DRV might develop a "national communism" of the Tito model, and rejecting ideas that the DRV might usefully pursue a course independent of the Bloc. 89/ The following January, 1957, after a stormy autumn of insurrection, the Rectification of Errors Campaign, and "Hundred Flowers," Ho was surprised by the Soviet proposal at the United Nations to formalize Vietnamese disunity by admitting both the DRV and the GVN as member states. 90/ Nor were these the only instances of tepid support or countervailing policy from the Soviets. The DRV forwarded messages to the GVN in July 1955, May and June 1956, July 1957, March 1958, July 1959, and July 1960, urging a consultative conference on elections, offering to negotiate on the basis of "free general elections by secret ballot," and urging liberalization of North-South relations. Throughout, the Soviet Union never went beyond words and gestures of solidarity.

For Ho Chi Minh, the major international difficulties in securing foreign aid had internal ramifications as well. There is evidence of a rising tide of conviction within the Lao Dong Party that more forceful measures were necessary towards reunification, which took the form in 1957 of an attack upon Ho Chi Minh's own position, and upon the Soviet-oriented faction within the Party elite. 91/ There was also an evident realignment of the DRV hierarchy in which Le Duan, an advocate of forceful resolution of the impasse with Diem, came to prominence in mid-1957. 92/ (Le Duan who served in the South, through 1956, appears to have been de facto the Secretary General of the Party 1957-1960; thereafter, he openly held the office, and is considered the second ranking member of the Politburo.) 93/

Ho Chi Minh, despite rumors that he was dead or discarded, survived the 1957 crisis seemingly intact.

By 1958 the DRV elite were apparently more disposed to seek their own solutions in Vietnam, less sensitive to the persistent coolness of Khrushchev, and more responsive to Mao than theretofore. After

1958, in the developing Sino-Soviet dispute, the DRV tended to indorse Chinese doctrine and methods, but was careful to avoid Peking-style abuse of the Russians. Ho, on occasion, served as mediator in the dispute, but on such central issues as disarmament, "peaceful coexistence," and Moscow's call for "democratic centralism" in the world communist movement, Ho's view by 1960 approximated that of Mao: independent, activist and bellicose, at least insofar as Diem's GVN was concerned. <sup>94/</sup> Nonetheless, DRV support for the Soviet Union, qualified though it was, paid off. In the period 1954 to 1960, the USSR supplanted the CPR as its prime foreign aid donor:

Communist Economic Aid Extended DRV  
(Millions of U.S. Dollars) <sup>95/</sup>

	<u>China</u>	<u>USSR &amp; East Europe</u>
1955-1957: Grants	200	100
Credits	<u>---</u>	<u>19.5</u>
Total	200	119.5
1958-1960: Grants	25	--
Credits	<u>75</u>	<u>159</u>
Total	100	159

4. Vietnamese Hegemony

The foregoing discussion has been confined to the immediate foreign policy goals of the DRV in the aftermath of Geneva. There remains, however, a more far-reaching objective: Vietnamese domination over Indochina. As mentioned, modern Vietnam is the product of conquest. <sup>96/</sup> The Khmers (Cambodians) and the tribes along Viet Nam's Laotian frontier have historic cause for apprehension over Viet forays westward. In the nineteenth century, just ahead of French imperialism in Indochina, Vietnamese forces occupied and annexed contiguous Laotian frontier provinces (those which were roughly the territory controlled by DRV-linked Pathet Lao in 1963). <sup>97/</sup> But in current era, the furthest reaching of all Viet expansionist aspirations were those of the Communist Party of Indochina (ICP), which from its foundation aimed at the establishment of political control over Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam, and which regarded a workers and peasants government over a unified Indochina both feasible and necessary. According to a Lao Dong Party history published in Hanoi in 1960: "The Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian proletariat have politically and economically to be closely related in spite of their differences in language, custom, and race." <sup>98/</sup> The history quoted echoes the sense of one of the earliest known Lao Dong Party directives, captured in South Vietnam, dated November, 1951, entitled: "Remarks on the Official Appearance of the Vietnamese Workers Party." In a section labeled "Reasons for the



Division Into Three Parties And For the Change in the Party Name," the document states that the Communist Party would continue to promote revolution throughout Southeast Asia as it had in the past, and stressed its essential unity despite outward appearances:

"The creation of a separate party for each of the three Nations does not prejudice the revolutionary movement in Indochina.

"(a) In 1930, we recommended the creation of an Indo-chinese Communist Party, not only because Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos suffered under the same yoke of domination and had the same enemy, but also because at that time only the Revolutionary Movement in Vietnam was in a state of development, while it was still weak in Cambodia and Laos. If at that time there had not been one Communist Party for the three countries, the creation of a Communist and revolutionary movement in Cambodia and Laos would certainly have been retarded.

"Today, however, the situation has changed. The Cambodian and Laotian peoples are rising to oppose the French and obtain their independence. Communist Party sections exist in Cambodia and Laos and are beginning to grow. Cambodia and Laos already have a united Liberation Front (Issarak in Cambodia; Issara in Laos). Cambodia has a National Liberation Committee; Laos a Resistance Government, etc....Within these organizations there are already groups of faithful Communists who act as Delegations to the Indochinese Communist Party from which they receive directives. For that reason, the creation of a separate Communist Party for the working class of Vietnam does not risk weakening the leadership of the revolutionary movements in Cambodia and Laos or the carrying out of Marxist-Lenin propaganda action. In addition, the Vietnamese Party reserves the right to supervise the activities of its brother Parties in Cambodia and Laos.

"(b) Each Nation - Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, has its own Party, but unity of leadership and action remain between the three Parties. There are several means of unifying the leadership and action. For example, the Central Executive Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party has designated a Cambodian and a Laotian bureau charged with assisting the revolutionary movements in these countries. It organizes periodic assemblies of the three parties in order to discuss questions of common interest; it works towards the creation of a Vietnamese-Khmer-Laotian United Front.

"(c) Militarily Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos constitute a combat zone; Vietnam has substantially assisted Cambodia and Laos

militarily as well as from all other points of view. The creation of a separate Vietnamese Party will not therefore weaken the military cooperation between the three Nations in the fight they are waging against the imperialists. Later, however, if conditions permit, the three revolutionary Parties of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos will be able to unite to form a single Party: the Party of the Vietnam-Khmer-Laotian Federation." 99/

P. J. Honey stated in 1965 that one of the main requirements of DRV foreign policy was "to impose Communist Vietnamese rule over Laos and Cambodia," but noted that:

"It is open to debate whether this ambition for territorial aggrandisement springs from the expansionist nature of Communism, from the imperialist character of the Vietnamese people which has shown itself repeatedly through their history over the past millenium, or from the feeling that they had played the major role in driving out French colonial power and were therefore entitled to the fruits of their efforts. What emerges very clearly is that the actions of the Vietnamese Communists since 1951 are entirely consistent with the aim set out in the document [quoted above]....

"North Vietnam shares a common frontier with Laos and undetermined numbers of North Vietnamese soldiers have been operating on laotian territory for several years. Moreover, the nominal head of the Pathet Lao, Prince Souphanouvong, has spent more years in Vietnam than in Laos and is the husband of a senior Vietnamese Communist. For both reasons Laos presents her with the ideal circumstances for the pursuit of her expansionist aims. Additionally, the prosecution of the war in South Vietnam requires that men and supplies be infiltrated into that state, and eastern Laos provides the most secure and convenient route for such traffic....

"Cambodia touches the territory of no Communist state and is, in consequence, not amenable to the same tactics as those employed in Laos. Instead, the Vietnamese Communist leaders have attempted to cement relations with the established, non-Communist government of Norodom Sihanouk in order to induce that government to create as many embarrassments and difficulties as possible for the rival Vietnamese regime in Saigon. By exploiting historic Cambodia antagonisms towards neighbouring Thailand and South Vietnam, they have achieved the rupture of diplomatic relations between Cambodia and these two states, but....Norodom Sihanouk has reached the conclusion that China, not North Vietnam, will exercise the dominant influence over South East Asia in the years to come and has evinced a readiness to reach an accommodation with the Chinese, whose objectives do not necessarily coincide with those of the North Vietnamese at all points...." 100/



The 1951 Lao Dong document quoted above stipulated that:

"Not only is it our duty to aid the revolutionaries in Cambodia and Laos, but we must also aid the revolutionary movements in the other countries of Southeast Asia, countries such as Malaya, Indonesia, Burma, etc." 101/

Since DRV independence in 1954, its foreign policy has openly supported neutral regimes in Laos and Cambodia, while covertly it has undertaken major politico-military operations in Laos, and supported subversive organizations in Cambodia and Thailand. 102/ It is possible to infer, as has P. J. Honey, that the ultimate DRV objective is Vietnamese hegemony over Indochina: quasi-independent, communist governments controlled by the Hanoi leaders through the Lao Dong apparatus. However, it is also possible to interpret the Lao Dong Party tracts as bombast, and DRV extra-territorial operations as a necessary part of its thrust toward reunification of Vietnam. It is clear that DRV control of the Laotian Panhandle and the Mu Gia and Keo Nua Passes would be essential to any contemplated large scale infiltration of men and materiel from North to South Vietnam.

#### D. Links With the Viet Cong

From 1954 on, the DRV possessed four principal ties with insurgents within South Vietnam: the Southern Viet Minh who were regrouped to the North; the "Fatherland Front," the DRV mass political organization devoted in part to maintaining identification with Southerners, and promoting the cause of reunification before the world; some commonality of leaders; and the Lao Dong Party. Each of these deserve discussion preliminary to analyzing the extent to which these links permitted Hanoi to influence the form and pace of the insurgency in South Vietnam.

1. Southerners in the North. The estimated 130,000 "regroupees" of Geneva in North Vietnam after the evacuations of 1954-1955 included as many as 90,000 "soldiers," and possibly half that number of dependents. There were among them possibly 10,000 children, and about the same number of Montagnards. Of this entire group, U.S. intelligence estimates indicate that about 30-35,000 have since returned to South Vietnam. 103/ Regroupees provided virtually all the infiltrators in the period 1959-1964. Thereafter, known infiltration has been almost exclusively by Northerners, which has led U.S. intelligence to conclude that the DRV had by 1964 exhausted its "pool" of trained and able manpower among the regroupees. 104/ As of July, 1967, the GVN had only a small fraction of the Southern regroupee infiltrators under its control: 180 POW, and an undetermined (probably very much smaller) number of defectors. 105/ In August, 1966, a DOD contractor published a study based on detailed interrogation of 71 of these regroupees (56 POW and 15 defectors) plus 9 other NLF members. 106/ Two out of three in the sample were Communist Party members; all regroupees had undergone intensive training in the DRV before being sent south. The earliest trip South by any among the group was 1960, the latest 1964. The survey of their experiences and attitudes affords some insights into the policy and operations of the DRV.

Most of the physically fit Southerners had been placed in the North Vietnam Army (NVA) where they acquired military training and discipline, and political indoctrination--the 305th, 324th, 325th, 330th, and 338th NVA Divisions were filled with Southerners, and remained so until 1959, when infiltration started on a large scale. 107/ Those Southerners with non-military professional skills were placed in DRV civilian society where they could be useful. But all, no matter where placed, were apparently watched to assess their reliability, and eventually selected for return to the South by DRV authorities. Civilians were urged to "volunteer" to return, soldiers were ordered to do so. Almost all were pleased to comply, not only because it meant a return to family and land of birth, but because few liked North Vietnam, and because they had heard of the sufferings inflicted upon their people by the GVN, and wanted to "liberate" them from Diem and the Americans. The chosen were then sent to special training centers -- the most important of which for the interviewed regroupees was at Xuan Mai -- where they attended courses of several weeks to several months, depending on their background. The emphasis -- about two-thirds of instructional time -- was on political indoctrination. Themes included an impending victory in the South, to be followed by "peace, neutrality, and reunification." They were taught that after infiltration, they were to approach uncommitted Southerners, by stressing the land reform policy of the Viet Cong, by urging families to call back sons serving in ARVN, and by castigating the agroville-strategic hamlet program of the GVN. One propaganda specialist related that he was instructed to press three programs: political struggle, armed struggle, and "military proselyting" (vinh van) -- the latter again aimed at sapping the will of ARVN to fight, and causing desertions.

Following training, the regroupees were formed into units of 40 to 400 for the trip south. A few were infiltrated by sea, but the majority were taken by truck through North Vietnam to Laos, and thence walked south on foot. The journey took at least two and one-half months; most reported the trails were well organized, with camps built at intervals, and guides available at each camp to conduct arrivals on the next leg of their trip. Strict camouflage discipline was observed, and conversations with camp attendants or guide personnel was forbidden. On arrival at their destinations in South Vietnam, they were smoothly integrated into local Viet Cong organizations. (Little subsequent friction was reported by the regroupees between themselves and the Viet Cong, but some southern VC recruited in the late Fifties or early Sixties, the "winter cadres," have expressed animosity toward the "autumn cadres," as the regroupees were called.)

The interviews with the regroupees suggest that:

- The DRV quite deliberately organized, and trained an infiltration force of Southerners.
- The infrastructure for doing so -- the training centers and the infiltration routes south -- indicate extensive preparations for the process before it was started in earnest in 1960.



-- The DRV had specific political, as well as military, objectives in returning the Southerners, including the overturning of Diem, and eventually, reunification.

The interrogations of the regroupees also indicate that the DRV viewed the regroupees as a long-range political asset, establishing special schools and educational programs for Southern children. A captured Viet Cong Lieutenant Colonel stressed this point, and quoted Phan Hung of the Lao Dong Politburo, speaking at the Third Party Congress in September 1960:

"The Party has tried to develop 10,000 teenage children regrouped from the RVN into a cohesive group of engineers, doctors, professors, and other specialists for the future. This is proof that the Party has looked out for the welfare of the South Vietnamese too." 108/

The informant stressed that at least until he left North Vietnam in November, 1961, none of this shadow national elite had been conscripted: in his view, the DRV had yet to use a powerful political force, a cadre for South Vietnam whose attitudes had been carefully conditioned by more than a decade of education in the DRV, the Soviet Union, or other communist countries. As of 1968, there is no information that the DRV had committed these cadres in South Vietnam.

In early 1967, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, an interagency study group was convened from CIA, DIA, and the Department of State for a comprehensive review of U.S. intelligence concerning: "The North Vietnamese Role in the Origin, Direction, and Support of the War in South Vietnam." 109/ The resultant study validates the foregoing observations on the regroupees in all respects, as do other captured documents and interrogation reports. Taken together, available evidence indicates that infiltration of regroupees from North to South Vietnam began as early as 1955. For example, a U.S. intelligence report of November, 1955 reported on the arrival of 50 regroupees in October, 1955; and the Lieutenant Colonel mentioned above, an intelligence officer, described trips to South Vietnam and back in 1955, 1956, and 1958.

However, from all indications, the early infiltration was quite small scale, involving no more than a few hundred persons in all. There are no reports indicating DRV preparations of an apparatus to handle large-scale, systematic movements of people and supplies before 1958. Early in that year, according to one prisoner, Montagnards from Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces began to receive training in North Vietnam in the establishment and operation of way-stations and guide systems in Laos and South Vietnam; the prisoner left North Vietnam in March, 1959 with a group of other cadre to organize tribesmen for those missions. He testified that thereafter he made several inspection trips along the routes to check on the building of troop shelters in the encampments. 110/ Several other POW have disclosed that in early 1959 they were chosen to man "special border-crossing teams" for moving drugs, food, and other materiel across

the DMZ into Quang Tri and Thua Thien. 111/ In April, 1959, a prisoner reported that the Lao Dong Party Central Committee directed the forming of a headquarters to control this effort, which came into being on May 5, 1959, as the 559th Transportation Group, directly subordinate to Party headquarters. 112/ Another prisoner served with the 70th Battalion of the 559th Group, which was formed in 1959 and sent into southern Laos. The 70th Battalion received weapons, ammunition, mail, and supplies from Hanoi and transported them to another organization in charge of distribution to insurgent units. The 70th Battalion was in charge of 20 way-stations, furnished escorts for infiltrating groups from North to South Vietnam, and transported sick and wounded personnel from Thua Thien Province back to North Vietnam. 113/ While the 559th Group was being deployed on land, other prisoners reported that the 603d Battalion was formed in June, 1959, to manage maritime infiltration into South Vietnam. 114/ According to prisoners, the 603d Battalion had 250 men upon formation, and by December, 1959, had 11 infiltration "cells" and supporting bases in operation.

Still other POWs stated that in January, 1960, a training center for infiltrators was in operation at Son Tay, northwest of Hanoi, and that in early 1960, the NVA 324th Division in Nghe An was directed to begin infiltrator training. 115/ About the same time the Xuan Mai Infiltration Center was established southwest of Hanoi, a school which by 1961 could accommodate several 1000-man classes simultaneously. 116/

Moreover, available evidence points to 1959 as the year in which significant numbers of regroupees began to be funneled from North Vietnam through the way-station system into South Vietnam. George Carver, of CIA, has conservatively estimated that 1959 infiltration amounted to a "few hundred." 117/ Altogether, during 1959 and 1960, twenty-six groups of infiltrators, comprising 4500 personnel, were confirmed by interrogations of two or more prisoners from each group. 118/ The same sources established that most of the infiltrators were military officers, senior non-commissioned officers or trained political cadre. Captured documents and interrogations also indicate that at least half--military and civilian--were regular Lao Dong Party members. The following table shows U.S. intelligence estimates of infiltration into South Viet-Nam from 1959 through 1965; during 1963 "regroupee" resource waned visibly, and in 1964 apparently dried up; by early 1965 at least three out of four infiltrators were ethnic North Vietnamese. 119/



Infiltration from North to South Vietnam  
1959-1965

<u>Year</u>	<u>Confirmed (1)</u>	<u>Probable (2)</u>	<u>Total (3)</u>
1959 ) (4)	4556	26	4582
1960 )			
1961	4118	2177	6295
1962	5362	7495	12857
1963	4726	3180	7906
1964	9316	3108	12424
1965	23770	1910	25680

- (1) A confirmed unit/group is one which is determined to exist on the basis of accepted direct information from a minimum of two prisoners, returnees or captured documents (any combination, in addition to indirect evidence).
- (2) A probable infiltration unit/group is one believed to exist on the basis of accepted direct information from one captive, returnee, or captured document, in addition to indirect evidence.
- (3) The total does not represent all the data on hand. In 1965 a "possible" category was added to show units/group thought to be in South Vietnam on the basis of unconfirmed evidence. Adding the "possible" category raises the totals for 1965 to 33,730. Still other information, though available, has been considered insufficient to warrant adding to the totals.
- (4) The figure shown is for both 1959 and 1960.

There is no evidence that the regroupees themselves exerted significant pressure upon the DRV leaders to undertake the infiltrations or force reunification by other means. Many were dissatisfied with the North, but there is no record that they openly and collectively agitated for return to the South. Rather, they appear to have been retained in large groups only within disciplined military units, and otherwise they had no appreciable collective identity outside the formal groupings organized or authorized by the DRV. The DRV did appeal to them as a group from time to time, but principally when it wished to mobilize opinion against some deed of the GVN. For example, in December, 1958, in Diem's "political re-education center" at Phu Loi (Thu Dau Mot), just north of Saigon, there was an epidemic food-poisoning in which at least twenty prisoners died. Hanoi launched a major propaganda effort to exploit the mishap, claiming that: 120/

"Six thousand former resistance members and fighters for peace and national reunification, six thousand patriots, men

and women of all ages and ways of life, detained without trial in a concentration camp as an act of reprisal, were victims of a wholesale food-poisoning which resulted in more than a thousand dead on the very first day. The survivors were hurriedly taken to other camps or left dying behind the Phu Loi barbed wire...."

The Phu Loi Massacre became one of the cases which underwrote Hanoi's appeal to the world in 1959 and 1960 to end:

"....this regime of terror and massacre set up by Ngo Dinh Diem in the south of our country at the behest of the U.S. imperialists. It is the duty of all honest people to extinguish this hotbed of war....According to available data which cannot be complete from July, 1954, date of the signing of the Geneva Agreements, to February, 1959, 180,843 former resistance members were arrested, 50,000 others were subjected to a regime of forced labour in the so-called 'Agricultural colonies.' The Phu Loi camp is part of this network of sorrow and affliction which Ngo Dinh Diem, the henchman of the American imperialists, hopes to quench the aspirations for freedom, independence and national unity of our people..../footnote/ The famous declaration of Diem, during his visit to Washington in 1957: 'The United States' frontier extends as far as the 17th parallel in Vietnam.'" 121/

At the forefront of the "movement of protest" were Southerners in North Vietnam, who could write or speak with special poignancy about the event. Thus, the regroupees became a strategic propaganda as well as personnel resource for the DRV.

2. The Fatherland Front. Policy on the regroupees, and orchestration of propaganda relating to reunification with South Vietnam, was apparently reserved to the top echelon of the Lao Dong Party. There is some evidence of the existence as early as 1957 of a branch of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee called the "Reunification Department," which had purview over all matters relating to regroupees; the Department or Commission was surfaced at the Third Party Congress, September, 1960. 122/ A prisoner taken in 1964, a regroupee from Binh Dinh Province, indicated that he worked for this Department for some years prior to infiltrating in 1963, with duties of supervising civilian cadres. He described the Department's having a personnel management system, with formal records and reports, education programs for cadres and their children; he also stated that the Committee decided which regroupees would be ordered South. 123/ The head of the Reunification Department of the Lao Dong Party possibly since 1957, and at least since 1960, was Nguyen Van Vinh, an NVA Major General, a Deputy Chief of Staff of the NVA, a Vice Minister of Defense and a member of the Party Central Committee.



Vinh was in South Vietnam up until late 1956. 124/

However, overt DRV political activities with the regroupees or on behalf of reunification, were normally carried out through the Fatherland Front, which, as mentioned above, from its foundation in 1955 advanced proposals for rejoining North and South Vietnam. With the founding of the NLF in late 1960, the Fatherland Front became its DRV counterpart, its propaganda counterpoint, its sounding board, and international sponsor. 125/ In fact the NLF was set up as a mirror image of the Fatherland Front:

SELECTED COMPONENT ORGANIZATIONS

<u>National Liberation Front</u> <u>(South Vietnam)</u>	<u>Fatherland Front</u> <u>(North Vietnam)</u>
People's Revolutionary Party (PRP)	Lao Dong Party
Democratic Party	Democratic Party
Radical Socialist Party	Socialist Party
Association of Labor	General Confederation of Labor
Association of Women	Women's Union
Association of Youth	Youth Federation
Association of Artists and Writers	Writers and Artists Union
Association of Democratic Journalists	Journalists Association
Association of South-Vietnamese Buddhists	Unified Buddhist Association
	National Liaison Committee for Patriotic and Peace Loving Catholics
	Vietnam-Soviet Friendship Association
	Vietnam-Chinese Friendship Association
	Vietnam-French Friendship Association
South Vietnam Committee for the Defense of Peace	Peace Committee
South Vietnamese Committee for Afro- Asian Peoples Solidarity	Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee

3. Common Leadership. North and South Vietnam have shared leaders throughout the last three decades, a commonality which has lately developed into Northerners holding the top posts both within the GVN and within the MLF. Tran Van Gian, an old ICP leader, headed the "front" government in Saigon in 1945, and then returned to Hanoi to hold high DRV posts. His successor was Nguyen Phuong Thao (alias Nguyen Binh), a northerner, who led the Southern Resistance through 1951, and subsequently died in the North. 126/ Nguyen Phuong Thao (alias Nguyen Binh) was succeeded by Le Duan, who became First Secretary of the Lao Dong Party openly in 1960, and probably de facto in 1957. Le Duan's deputy was Le Duc Tho, in 1960 director of the Organizational Department of the Lao Dong Party, and a member of its Central Committee. Pham Hung, in 1960 a member of the Lao Dong Secretariat and a Deputy Premier of the DRV, and Ung Van Khiem, in 1960 on the Lao Dong Central Committee, were also among the leaders of the Southern Viet Minh through 1954.

Le Duan remained in the South after Geneva, or at least is mentioned in intelligence reports as being in the South frequently through 1957. 127/ His return to North Vietnam in mid-1957 precipitated, according to some sources, a struggle among Ho's lieutenants between a moderate faction opposing DRV support of guerrilla war in the South, and a militant faction led by Le Duan. 128/ He is also reported to have been sent on an inspection trip to the South in 1958, and in early 1959, to have presented a series of recommendations for immediate action in the South to the Lao Dong Central Committee. 129/ General Van Tien Dung, Chief of Staff of the NVA and alternate Politburo member, was reportedly a member of the Party's southern apparatus from mid-1955 through 1956, having been sent south to contract alliances with Hoa Hao and Cao Dai armed bands; Nguyen Van Vinh, one of his deputies, also served there at the same time. 130/ Intelligence is vague on Le Duan's replacement in 1957. However, among those northern leaders mentioned by intelligence sources as serving in the South in the period after 1956 are Tran Van Tra, Le Duan's pre-1954 military adviser in the South, and now a NVA deputy chief of staff; and Muoi Cuc (Nguyen Van Cuc), one of Le Duan's close followers. 131/

Both the infiltrated regroupees and the relatively few northerners who accompanied them in the years 1959-1963 were lower-level leaders. As George Carver put it:

"They were not foot soldiers or cannon fodder (at least not until Hanoi began sending in whole North Vietnamese units in late 1964 or early 1965). Instead they were disciplined, trained and indoctrinated cadres and technicians. They became the squad leaders, platoon leaders, political officers, staff officers, unit commanders, weapons and communications specialists who built the Viet Cong's military force into what it is today. They also became the village, district, provincial and regional committee chiefs and key committee members who



built the Viet Cong's political apparatus.

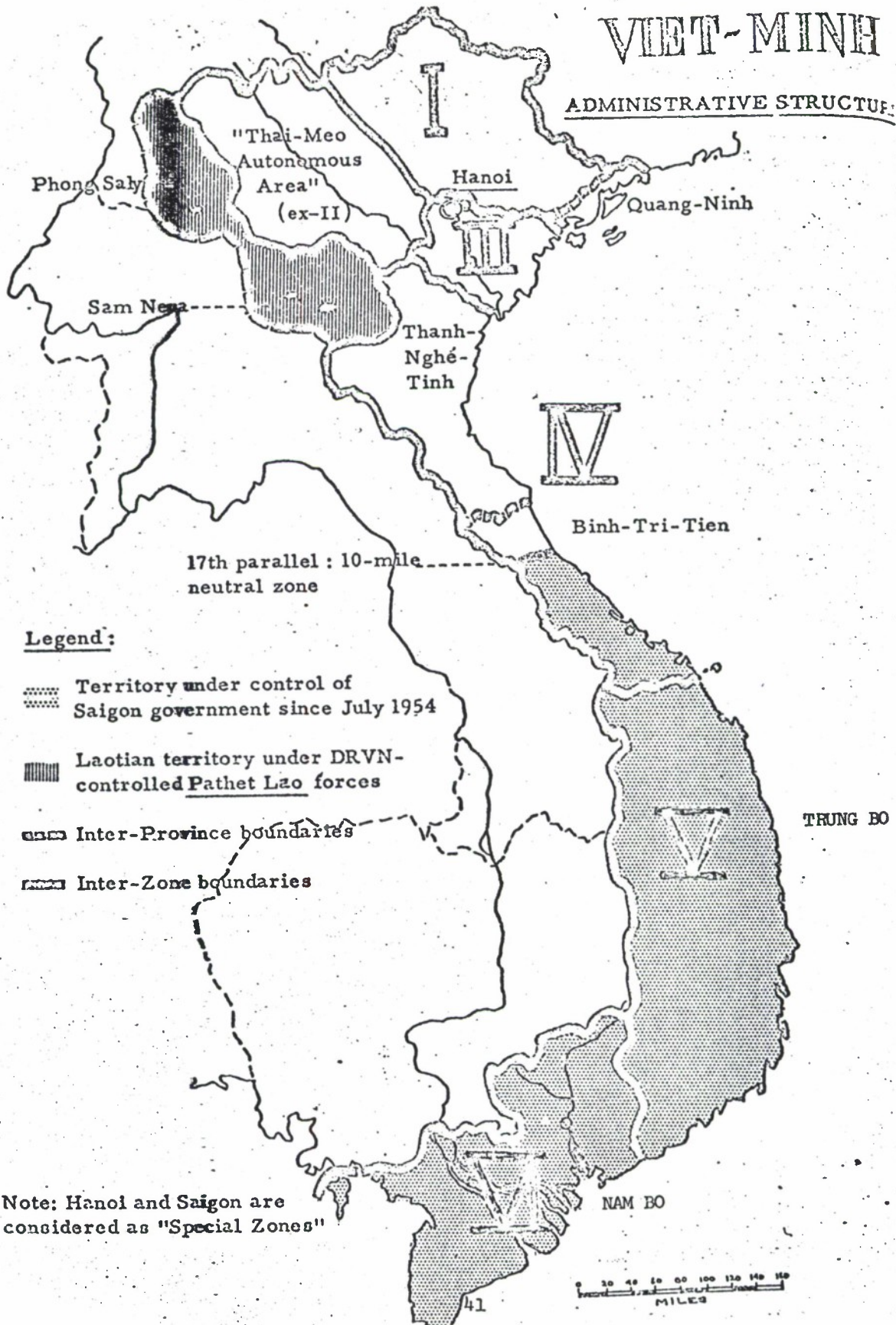
"The earlier arrivals had had at least five years of indoctrination and training in North Viet Nam, or elsewhere in the Communist bloc, before departing on their southern missions . . ." 132/

The monopoly of Viet Cong leadership by the infiltrators from the North became evident after 1960. By 1965, they were clearly dominant. For example, while southerners still controlled the Viet Cong of the Mekong Delta, in the provinces just north of Saigon -- Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Binh Hoa, and Phuoc Tuy especially -- regroupes and northerners had assumed most of the principal command positions. A document captured in January 1966 listed 47 VC officials attending a top-level party meeting for that region, of whom 30 had infiltrated from 1961 through 1965. Seven of these, all holding high posts in the regional command, were North Vietnamese. 133/ U.S. intelligence has estimated that one-third of the infiltrators from 1962 through 1964 were military officers or political leaders. 134/ A high-level defector from the VC 165A Regiment, charged with the Saigon region, stated that in 1965 8 of its 20 top officers were infiltrators. Other prisoners and ralliers have provided evidence that from one-quarter to one-third of Viet Cong officers in Liberation Army units were infiltrated from the North. At Viet Cong central headquarters in Tay Ninh -- Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) -- Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh of the NVA and Major General Tran Van Tra of the NVA and the Lao Dong Central Committee, his deputy, both North Vietnamese, held the top positions in the Communist Party Secretariat, under which there was a Military Affairs Committee heavily weighted with North Vietnamese military officers. By 1966 it was clear that in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, the NVA was in direct command. General Hoang Van Thai, a deputy chief of staff of the NVA, and Major General Chu Huy Man, a member of the Lao Dong Central Committee, commanded all VC/NVA operations there. 135/

4. The Communist Party. U.S. intelligence has been relatively well assured that throughout the years since 1945 the Communist Party of North Vietnam -- in its several guises -- has remained active in South Vietnam and in control of the Communist Party there. Public statements by Ho, by Truong Chinh, and other DRV leaders confirmed intelligence collected by the French that the Party went underground upon its formal disestablishment in 1945, but stayed operational and united throughout Vietnam. 136/ The Party publicly and privately took credit for organizing and leading the Viet Minh in the years 1945 to 1951, and upon the DRV's legalizing the Lao Dong Party in 1951, openly identified the latter with both the Indochinese Communist Party pre-1945, and the covert Party of the years thereafter. By 1954, the Party seems to have asserted itself in virtually all of the Viet Minh's sprawling undertakings. Party members held the key positions in the Front, both in the North and in the South, and Party cadre served as the chain of command for both operational intelligence and decisions. 137/ The Viet Minh administered South Vietnam as two "interzones" or regions (see map), and established

# VIET-MINH

## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE





a principal subordinate Party headquarters on Ca Mau Peninsula called the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), headed by Le Duan. 138/ However, the 1951 statutes of the Lao Dong Party, like other DRV official pronouncements, recognized in principle no separate identity for South Vietnam or South Vietnamese communists. 139/ It was the Lao Dong Party cadre which sorted out the southern Viet Minh for regroupment or stay-behind missions, and the regroupees themselves felt that their fate was thereafter in the hands of the Lao Dong leaders. 140/

As the Viet Minh military apparatus was dismantled, COSVN was apparently closed down. There is convincing evidence, however, that from 1955 on, there were two Party headquarters -- or at least communications centers -- in South Vietnam, each communicating directly with Lao Dong headquarters in Hanoi. 141/ One of these was located in "Nam Bo" (South Zone), the other was located in "Trung Bo" (Central Zone, Region Five). Captured documents and prisoners indicate that these headquarters were active in handling the infiltration between North and South Vietnam in the years immediately after Geneva; they are also mentioned as the site of conferences between southern Vietnamese and northern leaders like Le Duan and Van Tien Dung. 142/ While prisoners and captured documents have established these links between Hanoi and the South, reports are too few in number and insufficiently comprehensive to warrant the conclusion that Hanoi was always in a position to dictate or even manipulate events in South Vietnam; they do offer persuasive evidence that the Lao Dong Party continued conspiratorial, political, and military activities in South Vietnam throughout the years 1954 to 1960. Moreover, the documents and interrogations are supported by circumstantial evidence. The village level organization of the Viet Cong, even that in the early years of the insurgency, VC propaganda techniques, and the terror-persuasion methodology employed by the early Viet Cong, all closely followed the doctrine of the Lao Dong Party. 143/ The eventual appearance of a "front" structured like the Fatherland Front; the reiteration by Cong of propaganda themes being trumpeted by Hanoi; and indications of preoccupation within the Viet Cong leadership over following the Lao Dong Party line also support the conclusion that the Party was playing a significant role in the mounting rebellion against Diem.

In 1961, when the People's Revolutionary Party of South Vietnam came into being, there was some effort in both North and South to portray it as an indigenous South Vietnamese party, independent of the Lao Dong. But documents and prisoners have since proved that if this were the case, neither the Viet Cong hierarchy nor rank-and-file believed it so. A document captured in 1962, a provincial party directive, stated that the creation of the PRP "is only a matter of strategy . . . to deceive the enemy . . . Our party is nothing but the Lao Dong Party of Vietnam, unified from North to South, under the direction of the Central Executive Committee of the Party, the chief of which is President Ho." 144/ Another party directive captured in 1966 provided that: "the masses who have good sympathy towards the Party should be well informed that the Lao Dong Party and the People's Revolutionary Party are one party headed by the Central Committee with

Chairman Ho at the head." 145/ An NVA naval officer captured in 1966, a second generation Party member, asserted that: "Once South Vietnam has been liberated, the NLF will suffer the same fate as the Viet Minh did in North Vietnam after independence was gained from the French. The Front will atrophy and quickly disappear . . ." This officer was emphatic that: "The Lao Dong and the PRP are one and the same organism . . . the PRP and the Lao Dong will emerge into the open (after reunification) as one party . . . under Ho's authority." 146/

In March, 1962, the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) was reactivated, built around the Nambo Inter-Zone Committee, and given purview over Cochinchina and Annam. The 1962 reorganization is believed to have been intended to improve the coordination of insurgent activity and to lend substance to the newly created PRP.

Available evidence indicates that the PRP is the southern element of the DRV Lao Dong Party. But whether the PRP is a subsidiary of the Lao Dong Party or merely a territorial department of the Party is unclear. Pointing to a parent-subsidiary relationship are the facts that membership requirements in the PRP are considerably less stringent than in the Lao Dong Party, that the PRP regulations are designed for an independent entity, and that the SVN military party system is subordinate to COSVN, whereas the DRV military party system is not subordinate to analogous party committees. But Vietnamese Communists assert that there is only one Vietnamese Communist Party because Vietnam is one country; the Lao Dong Party appears to count PRP members in its official membership figures; and infiltrating Lao Dong Party members are automatically accorded PRP membership. The fact that some members of the Lao Dong Central Committee are officials of COSVN could be consistent with either relationship; whatever the exact relationship, COSVN is the extension of the Lao Dong. COSVN's immediate superior in the Lao Dong Party hierarchy seems to be the Party's Reunification Department, which is believed to have issued specific orders to COSVN based upon the directives of the Lao Dong Central Committee. The principal function of the Reunification Department seems to be to act as the COSVN liaison office in DRV, where it forwards correspondence and recruits and trains political cadre before infiltration south. COSVN leadership of the military party system in SVN appears to have been subject to the technical supervision of the Lao Dong Central Military Committee. 147/

George Carver has summarized well presently available information concerning command linkage between Hanoi and the South:

"As the organizational structure of the Viet Cong movement has expanded over the past four years, its general outlines have become fairly well known. In the insurgency's initial phase (1954-1959), the Communists retained the Viet Minh's division of what is now South Viet Nam into 'Interzone V'



(French Annam below the 17th parallel) and the 'Nambo' (Cochin China), with each area under Hanoi's direct control. In late 1960 or early 1961, this arrangement was scrapped and field control over all aspects of the Viet Cong insurgency vested in a still existing, single command headquarters, originally known as the Central Office for South Viet Nam (or C.O.S.V.N. --a term still in circulation) but now usually referred to by captured Viet Cong as simply the P.R.P.'s Central Committee. This command entity, which also contains the headquarters of the N.L.F., is a mobile and sometimes peripatetic body, usually located in the extreme northwestern tip of Tay Ninh province in prudent proximity to the Cambodian border. . . . At the 1962 Geneva Conference on Laos, a member of the North Vietnamese delegation inadvertently commented that the published roster of the Lao Dong Party's Central Committee did not include some members whose identities were kept secret because they were 'directing military operations in South Viet Nam.' One of the four examples he cited was 'Nguyen Van Cuc,' which is one of the aliases used by the Chairman of the P.R.P. This Lao Dong Central Committee member, whose true name we do not know, is probably the overall field director of the Viet Cong insurgency in South Viet Nam. The overall commander of Viet Cong military forces (who would be a subordinate of Cuc's within the Communist command structure) is almost certainly the Chairman of the (P.R.P.) Central Committee's Military Committee--a man who uses the name Tran Nam Trung but whom several captured Viet Cong cadre members have insisted is actually Lieutenant-General Tran Van Tra, a Deputy Chief of Staff of the North Vietnamese army and an alternate member of the Lao Dong Central Committee. The director of all Viet Cong activity in V.C. Military Region 5 (the northernmost third of South Viet Nam) is Nguyen Don, a Major-General in the North Vietnamese army and another alternate member of the Lao Dong Central Committee, who in 1961 was commander of the North Vietnamese 305th Division but came south late that year or early in 1962. In short, not only does the P.R.P. control all aspects of the Viet Cong movement, including the N.L.F., and not only is it a subordinate echelon of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party, but the P.R.P.'s own leaders appear to be individuals who themselves occupy ranking positions within the Lao Dong Party hierarchy." 148/

However, while the fact of extensive DRV control over South Vietnam's insurgents after 1960 sheds light on recent DRV policy, it does not answer the questions of when and why that control was imposed. These are best addressed in the broad context of world events, which, as much as DRV domestic politics, or U.S. and GVN policies, seem to have governed DRV strategy.

#### E. DRV Strategy: Objectives and Timing

From the close of the Geneva Conference on 22 July 1954, through Hanoi's announcement of the founding of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam on 29 January 1961, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam appears to have passed through four distinct phases in striving toward its national objectives of independence, reunification, assured foreign support, and Vietnamese hegemony in Southeast Asia.

1. Political Struggle: Summer, 1954 -- Summer, 1956. In the year following Geneva, the DRV executed its regroupments and pressed hard towards land reform and economic recovery. In February, 1955, the Malenkov clique fell from power in the USSR, and the Soviet Union came under a collective leadership within which Khrushchev was pre-eminent. Intimations that the new leaders were interested in pursuing a conciliatory policy in the Cold War distinctly at variance with the national interests of the DRV were manifest in Soviet inaction when the deadlines for consultations concerning the Geneva Plebiscite passed in July, 1955. 149/ Doubly disappointed that Diem was not overturned by the sects, and that its principal ally seemed ill-disposed to back its cause, the DRV maneuvered frenetically to precipitate a reconvening of the Geneva Conference and to stymie Diem. U.S. intelligence was aware of a directive passed down through Lao Dong Party channels in August, 1955, for subordinates to struggle against the Americans and Diem " . . . so that there may be a less dangerous administration that will go to a conference with us." 150/ In September, 1955, the newly created Fatherland Front brought out its proposal for a confederation of North and South Vietnam, coupled with assurances that in both entities landlords would get free treatment. In South Vietnam in the same month, on three occasions soldiers fired on crowds agitating for the Geneva Plebiscite. 151/ Captured reports from Party field operators in South Vietnam were pessimistic, containing predictions of "long, painful and complex struggle," and reporting weaknesses such that "it is not time . . . to meet the enemy." 152/

But within South Vietnam, Diem moved smoothly through his own plebiscite ejecting Bao Dai, announced plans for a new constitution, and proclaimed Ordinance No. 6 (11 January 1956), giving the GVN powerful legal recourse against "struggle movements." And just as the flurry of DRV diplomatic notes finally elicited help in the form of Chou En Lai's letter of 26 January 1956, calling for a new Geneva Conference, Khrushchev dropped the "de-Stalinization" bombshell: at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev, in denigrating Stalin, undermined the Soviet position as the fount of Communist international policy, and fractured the Communist Bloc. In April, 1956, just after the United Kingdom issued a note castigating the DRV for violation of the letter and spirit of the Geneva Accords, Khrushchev committed the Soviet Union to "peaceful competition" with the West:



"We say to the representatives of the capitalist world: 'You are for the development of capitalism. We are for socialism. We do not want to impose our institutions on you, but we will not allow you to interfere in our affairs: Therefore, there is only one way open to us -- peaceful competition.'" 153/

The Soviet softening, taken with the U.K. position, plus Diem's successful elections in March, 1956, seemed to write off action by the Geneva powers, and evidently caused serious reconsideration by the Lao Dong leaders. On 24 April 1956, Ho Chi Minh issued a statement reporting on the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, in which, in Hanoi's ca. 1960 version, he held that:

" . . . We have grasped the great significance of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This Congress has:

"Analyzed the new situation prevailing in the world, and pointed out the new conditions favorable to the preservation of peace and the advance toward socialism by the Revolutionary Parties of the working class and the laboring people;

"Clearly shown the Soviet Union's victorious road, giving us still greater enthusiasm and making us believe still more strongly in the invincible forces of the Soviet Union, the bastion of revolution and of world peace;

"Pointed out the tasks of the Communist Party in the ideological and organizational fields. The Congress particularly emphasized the application of Marxist-Leninist principles to collective leadership and opposed the cult of the individual.

"While recognizing that war may be averted, we must be vigilant to detect the warmongers' schemes; for as long as imperialism exists, the danger of war still exists.

"While recognizing that in certain countries the road to socialism may be a peaceful one, we should be aware of this fact: In countries where the machinery of state, the armed forces, and the police of the bourgeois class are still strong, the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle.

"While recognizing the possibility of reunifying Viet-Nam by peaceful means, we should always remember that our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are

preparing for war; therefore, we should firmly hold aloft the banner of peace and enhance our vigilance." 154/

The text of this statement reported by U.S. intelligence at the time, however, had Ho coupling his statement that "the enemies of our people still occupy one half of our national territory and are preparing for war . . ." with the ominous assertion that the DRV must "be in a position to change the form of the struggle . . ." Moreover, Truong Chinh, the Party First Secretary, was reported to have addressed the notion that "peaceful unification" of Vietnam might be "illusory and reformist." 155/

In May the Soviet Co-chairman of the Geneva Conference signed the letter calling upon the two Vietnams to observe the Accords, but in effect committing the Geneva powers and ICC to status quo in Vietnam. At this juncture, the DRV appeared resigned to partition for the foreseeable future, as evidenced in the public letter of 19 June 1956 from Ho Chi Minh to the restive regroupees, in which he undertook to explain and defend a "socialism in one country" strategy (see supra, p. 24), but stressed that "the present political struggle is a stage in our national democratic revolution . . . in the present political struggle, as in the Revolution and the Resistance, our compatriots in the South are in the vanguard, closely united and struggling heroically and perseveringly." 156/ As the deadlines for the Geneva Elections (July, 1956) approached, NVA troops were drawn back from the Demilitarized Zone in Vietnam to defensive positions; DRV diplomats wooed the neutral nations in search of support, openly advocating neutralization of Southeast Asia. Captured orders to Party cadre in South Vietnam stressed "an ideology of lying low for a long time . . ." 157/

The Geneva deadline passed uneventfully, the DRV by July being well impressed with the futility of looking to the Conference for aid. Ho's Pravda article of 2 August 1956 underscored the DRV's rejection of a go-it-alone strategy, and its continued fealty to the Bloc led by the Soviets. 158/

## 2. Internal Dissent and Reassessment: Summer, 1956 -- Fall, 1957.

By mid-1956, the Lao Dong Party leaders faced at home not only a crisis of confidence over their foreign policy failure, but the serious threat to internal security arising from reaction to the Land Reform Campaign. To stem deterioration of public morale, Ho announced on 18 August 1956 the "successful completion" of Land Reform, admitting to "errors" by the Party, and closing his statement with an appeal for unity under the Fatherland Front:



"Unity ~~is~~ our invincible force. In order to consolidate the North into a solid base for the struggle to reunify our country, our entire people should be closely and widely united on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance in the Viet-Nam Fatherland Front. It is all the more necessary for veteran and new cadres of the Party and Government to assume identity of ideas, to be united and single-minded, and to compete to serve the people." 159/

All through the fall of 1956, with the Party and the government under ~~patent~~ stress, the public statements of the Lao Dong leaders reiterated the theme. At the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party, in late October, 1956, Truong Chinh, as the proponent of Land Reform, was publicly sacrificed to "rectification of errors" and to national unity. Vo Nguyen Giap's confessional at the Tenth Plenum took place on 27 October 1956, the day after Diem promulgated the new Constitution of the Republic of South Vietnam and took office as its first president. North Vietnam's peasant uprisings in November further deepened the contrast between North and South, much to the DRV's disadvantage internationally. After a fence-mending December, the DRV summoned its National Assembly for one of its rare sessions. The Assembly took cognizance that "the struggle for unity would be long and difficult," and that "consolidation" of the North would have to take priority; on 22 January 1957 it passed a resolution stating that:

"The National Assembly confirms that in 1956, the work of strengthening the North and struggling for national reunification was crowned with great successes, though errors and shortcomings still existed in some work. Our successes are fundamental, and will certainly be developed. Our errors and shortcomings are few and temporary, and will certainly be removed, and are now in the process of being overcome." 160/

The National Assembly adjourned on 25 January 1957, the day after the Soviets proposed admitting North and South Vietnam to the United Nations as separate, sovereign states --- a move concerning which the DRV evidently had no warning, and which probably dates the nadir of DRV fortunes post-Geneva. 161/ Ho Chi Minh promptly denounced the Soviet action in a message to the UN, but at no time was the DRV more isolated.

It was about this period that mounting dissatisfaction with the Party leaders in South Vietnam began to be felt in Hanoi. Prisoners and documents attest that Le Duan, the Lao Dong chieftain in South Vietnam, had lost faith in "political struggle" as early as 1955; one source reported that it was Le Duan's view that Hanoi was "wasting time," and that the Diem government should be "forcibly

overthrown" as soon as possible if the DRV were to expect to "succeed in gaining control of South Vietnam." 162/ In February, 1956, Le Duan is reported to have conferred with southern leaders on tactics, and concluded that "military pressure" was essential for reunification. He is alleged to have called for a military campaign in the Highlands, and a revitalizing of the Communist Party apparatus in the South. There is some evidence of his having published these views in a book in late 1956. Hanoi, preoccupied with internal problems, was in no position to act on such proposals, but it could not ignore the "mood of skepticism and nonconfidence" -- as a southern communist later described it -- pervading the South.

Sometime in early 1957 Le Duan returned to Hanoi from South Vietnam to assume a key role in Lao Dong policy formulation. In any event, Ho Chi Minh evidently deferred to southern sentiment when on 15 February 1957 he applauded the "appeal of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the banning of atomic weapons and on reduction of armament," reaffirmed the DRV's similar devotion to peace, but went on to note that:

"The National Assembly has discussed the question of national reunification. The struggle waged by our people for this purpose is long and difficult but will certainly be victorious. To achieve national reunification, all our people must unite closely, make further efforts to consolidate the North and make it a basis for national liberation. Our deputies have voiced the iron will of our people in the work of national reunification. The National Assembly has many a time warmly welcomed the firm and consistent combativeness of our compatriots in the South. . .

" . . . the National Assembly has called on our compatriots throughout the country and residing abroad and on our People's Army to unite closely in their struggle, consolidate the North, maintain and extend the struggle waged in the South, and strengthen our international solidarity.

"The National Assembly has appealed to our compatriots in the South to struggle perseveringly and to strengthen their will for national reunification and independence. 'No force can hamper the determination of our people for unity and fraternal love.' . . .

"We are duty-bound to unite and struggle in order to carry into practice the decisions of the National Assembly, implement the policies and political lines of the Party and Government, speed up the tasks set for this year, increase production, practice savings, consolidate the North, and unite the people throughout the country on the basis of the program of the Fatherland Front for the struggle for national reunification." 163/



The U.S. is not well informed on how the Lao Dong leaders decided which to pursue of the several policy courses open to them, but there is evidence that the developing of consensus took several turnings. There appeared to be at first a move led by Ho and Giap toward strengthening DRV ties with the Soviets, crowned with some immediate success. On 28 February 1957 the UN General Assembly recommended to the Security Council that South Vietnam (and South Korea) be admitted to the UN. 164/ In early May, Diem paid a state visit to the U.S., where he received assurances of continued strong U.S. support. 165/ Whatever its reasons, the Soviet thereupon took a position against the admission to the UN of South Vietnam, and on 20 May 1957, Marshal Kliment E. Voroshilov, President of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet, arrived in Hanoi for a state visit billed in DRV newspapers as a "most important event." 166/ It then appears that Truong Chinh and other Sinophile leaders pressed hard for orientation toward Peking. Amid evidence of haste and confusion, Ho left the country to visit East Europe in July, 1957, returning after stops in Moscow and Peking on 30 August 1957. Ho was in Moscow in July when Khrushchev expelled Malenkov, Molotov, and Kaganovich -- the anti-party group -- from the Praesidium of the CPSU, and probably gained some first hand insight into the ideas of the new leaders. 167/ In his absence, the DRV signed a new economic agreement with the CPR, and on his return, he appears to have been plunged into a power struggle of some proportions. Ho Chi Minh issued a statement on 2 September 1957 that the government of South Vietnam had to respect the desire of its people for reunification, and averred that his European trip demonstrated a "complete unity of views" with fraternal countries and that the trip had "splendid" results. 168/ Also in September, Le Duan was formally admitted to the Politburo. In late October or early November, Ho left, somewhat mysteriously, for Moscow. Although Hanoi newspapers had announced a six week long fete in honor of the 40th anniversary of Russia's October Revolution, the actual celebrations were limited to a few, simple events, and handled low-key by the DRV and its press. Such speeches as were recorded had distinct Maoist overtones. Truong Chinh re-emerged from eclipse as the principal party spokesman, while Giap dropped from sight. Le Duan also went to Moscow, but returned without Ho Chi Minh. Then, in late December, amid rumors that Ho and Giap were dead, both reappeared in Hanoi, and resumed their former position. 169/ In 1958, the Soviets replaced the CPR as the DRV's prime aid donor.

In subsequent years, Lao Dong Party historians identified the meetings in Moscow in the fall of 1957 as one of the pivotal events in the modern history of Vietnam. Western commentators have focused on Khrushchev's speech in which he pointed out that capitalism was doomed but that, "the only correct path in the development of international relations is a policy of peaceful coexistence . . . We work from the premise that wars are not necessary to advance socialism . . ." 170/

But DRV attention has been directed to the Moscow Declaration of 1957, embodied in the "Communique on the Conference of Representatives of Communist and Workers Parties of Socialist Countries," which took quite a different line:

"The communist and workers parties are faced with great historic tasks . . . . In present day conditions in a number of capitalist countries, the working class has the possibility . . . . to unite the majority of the people, when state power without civil war can ensure the transfer of basic means of production to the hands of the people . . . . [However] in conditions in which the exploiting classes resort to violence against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility -- nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches and history confirms that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the severity and forms of class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism." 171/

The congruence of this Declaration with Ho's April, 1956, statement to the Ninth Plenum of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee (supra, 46-47) and with the rhetoric Hanoi had been using to condemn Diem, seems more than coincidental. Le Duan returned from Moscow ahead of Ho to present the results to the Lao Dong leaders, and issued on 7 December 1957 a public statement that the Declaration:

" . . . not only confirmed the line and created favorable conditions for North Vietnam to advance toward socialism, but has also shown the path of struggle for national liberation and has created favorable conditions for the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam." 172/

Some authorities have viewed the "crisis of 1957" within the Lao Dong leadership as a clash of factions over whether to align with the bellicose Mao (pro Truong Chinh, Nguyen Duy Trinh) or remain loyal to the temporizing Soviets (pro Ho and Giap). 173/ P. J. Honey, for example, found it significant that even Mao acknowledged Soviet leadership at the 1957 Moscow Conference, and notes that in February, 1948, the spokesman for the DRV National Assembly's Political Subcommittee announced that:

"Our firm international position is to stand in the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union. . . This position proceeds from our people's fundamental interests and from



the requirements of North Vietnam's advance towards socialism." 174/

Honey deprecated contrary statements issued by Hanoi about the same time -- e.g., that the NVA would "always stand ready by the side of the CPR in its struggle to recover Quemoy and Matsu, and to liberate Taiwan. . ." -- and thought that:

"It is very probable, although not a scrap of evidence has so far come to light which would corroborate it, that Ho Chi Minh was secretly reassuring the Soviet leaders, explaining that North Vietnam was supporting China only with empty words, while her actions proved that she had not been taken in by Maoist innovations." 175/

D. S. Zagoria interpreted the DRV strategy debate as less a dispute over external relations than over internal priorities: "The crucial local issue has resolved around the relative priority to be assigned to economic development of the North and struggle in the South." He concluded that "pro-Soviet" view prevailed simply because "between 1957 and 1960, northern leaders agreed on the need to concentrate on economic development." 176/

Proponents of both interpretations conclude that Hanoi's predilection for the USSR was ipso facto a deferral of support for the insurgency in the South. But the evidence supports a third interpretation. It is quite possible that the DRV leaders sought and won Soviet support because they found it impossible amicably to set priorities between internal and external national objectives. It seems evident that only the Soviets could offer the wherewithal to pursue both sets of goals simultaneously, and it is possible that the Lao Dong leaders opted for "guns and butter" rather than "socialism in one country." The apparent harmony among the pro-China and pro-Russia "factions" by early 1958 bespeaks such a compromise solution. Of course, serious doubt remains whether the Soviets would have valued DRV fealty high enough to pay the price, yet it seems that such could have been the case. The new DRV-USSR understanding reached during 1957 definitely included the extension of material aid which North Vietnam needed for its economic advancement. It evidently also included Soviet concurrence in a more adventuresome policy toward reunification. Whether or not specific DRV advances upon South Vietnam were countenanced, it is evident that the DRV leaders had obtained Soviet recognition that North Vietnam's circumstances placed it outside the range of strategic and doctrinal considerations which had lead Khrushchev, et al., into "peaceful competition" and "peaceful coexistence."

3. Preparations: Winter, 1958 -- Spring, 1959. In the autumn of 1957, and throughout 1958, violence in rural South Vietnam mounted, and increasingly manifested strategic direction. There is, however, only sparse evidence that North Vietnam was directing, or was capable of directing that violence. Yet even had the DRV determined in late 1957 to support insurgency in South Vietnam, there probably would have been little sign of that decision in 1958, so soon after it had been reached. The Lao Dong leaders were possibly the most experienced and dedicated group of professional revolutionaries in the world -- and probably the most cautious. Perhaps more than any other such group, the North Vietnamese communists had subjected their past to intense and objective scrutiny, striving to detect errors in strategy and tactics, and to derive lessons applicable to the future. The writings of Ho, Giap, Truong Chinh, and others have revealed that they were by no means satisfied that they had always made correct choices in the past on questions of war or peace. The salient lesson they have drawn is that premature revolution is significantly worse than no revolution at all, and they have repeatedly cited the abortive uprisings of 1930 and 1940 as cases in point. In both instances, amorphous, mainly spontaneous insurrection lead to failure, and then to reprisals and heavy losses among exposed middle and lower echelon Party leaders, which set back Party progress several years.

The 1940 rebellion has seemed particularly poignant to DRV commentators. When the Japanese invaded Tonkin in September, 1940, the Indochinese Communist Party, together with other Vietnamese nationalists, elected violent resistance. Demonstrations took place throughout the country. Ho Chi Minh was at the time in Kuming, with the ICP "External Bureau." He and his colleagues there counseled their in-country counterparts against proceeding beyond demonstrations, but the ardor of local leaders could not be dampened. In November, 1940, peasants in the Plain of Reeds took up arms, and there was shortly a series of peasant jacquerie, which spread throughout the Mekong Delta. As Ho, et al., had predicted, the uprising failed and the French administration in Saigon launched a savage repression which virtually destroyed the ICP organization in rural Cochinchina. 177/

In May, 1941, at the Eighth Plenum of the ICP Central Committee, there was an exhaustive review of the 1940 debacle, and a re-direction of party effort toward forming an alliance of all social classes and political parties, nationalist movements, religious sects, and anti-Japanese resistance groups. Social reform and communist slogans were de-emphasized. All the resources of the Party were to be thrown behind a new front group which would carry out the Party strategy; that group was the League for Independence of Vietnam, or the Viet Minh. 178/ Again and again thereafter, communist leaders in their speeches and published works have returned to the lessons of the abortive revolt and the Eighth Plenum: never squander Party grassroots



organizations in futile causes; submerge the Party in a broader cause, behind a national front.

The example of successful revolution most often held out by DRV leaders has been the "August Revolution" of 1945. The official DRV history points out that this uprising was successful because, under Party leadership, there had been: (1) a careful preparing of the people in both ideology and organization, including the training of cadres, the build-up of bases of resistance, and the organization of armed forces -- peoples' war, peoples' army; (2) a seizing of the right opportunity; (3) "launching the revolutionary high tide of the whole people" -- meaning the forming of a "national front" organization which could command the support of the majority of the people, including "all classes, nationalities, and religions"; (4) a skillful combining of military and political "struggle" -- that is, the employment of both forms of revolutionary endeavor, and the gradual shift in emphasis from political to military methods; (5) dividing the enemy by proselyting his armed forces, civil service, and citizenry. <sup>179/</sup> The first two lessons, on preparation for and careful timing of revolution, have received particular stress. Party history is accurate: Ho Chi Minh carefully husbanded his forces and waited for the moment to strike. Virtually all the energies of the Viet Minh from 1943 through the spring of 1945 were devoted to the patient development of a political infrastructure in rural areas, and the building of guerrilla strongholds in the mountains adjacent to China. Ho permitted his armed forces to begin systematic guerrilla warfare only after the Japanese set up an independent Vietnam under Bao Dai in March, 1945. Even then, however, he used them sparingly. There was supposed to have been a Viet Minh conference in June, 1945, to signal the "general uprising," but Ho Chi Minh delayed convening of this conference because he was convinced that uprising would be premature. Although DRV histories do not say so, there is, in fact, every indication that when the "August Revolution" was launched, it came not as a conscientious, coordinated effort controlled by Ho and his lieutenants, but as another more or less spontaneous rebellion. <sup>180/</sup> Confronted with the prospect of being a bystander while others won victory, Ho hastily convened the deferred conference on 16 August 1945, and formally committed the Viet Minh to the overthrow of Bao Dai and the expulsion of the French and Japanese. Within three weeks, the independence of the DRV was proclaimed, and Ho was installed in Hanoi as its president.

One example DRV historians do not often cite is the inception of the long and ruinous Resistance War which began in December, 1946. From all appearances, the DRV leaders still entertain serious doubts over the wisdom of going to war against France at that juncture. There is evidence that the incidents which opened the war in December, 1946, had not been condoned by Ho, and that he re-committed the Viet Minh to military action only reluctantly, and after events had issued their own dictum. Moreover, communist literature on the Resistance War of 1945-1954 abounds with reproach for local leaders

launching too-venturesome, costly enterprises without proper preparation. Even top leaders were not immune to criticism on that score; e.g., Le Duan was apparently relieved of command over COSVN in late 1952 or 1953 for pressing too fast and hard. 181/ From the highest strategic level to the lowest tactical level, Vietnamese communist doctrine underscores the essentiality of careful preparatory work, and the criticality of timing initial overt operations. 182/ It is not likely, then, that a decision to proceed toward the reunification of Vietnam by force was lightly taken by the Lao Dong leaders; it would in any event have countenanced extensive, painstaking, covert groundwork.

Such preliminary efforts might have been the refurbishing of the Communist Party in South Vietnam, which had been seriously weakened by Diem's persistent Communist Denunciation Campaign. It seems probable that, whenever they were started, the initial steps of the DRV were directed to reinvigorating the Lao Dong apparatus in the South. For this purpose it would have needed relatively few cadre -- for instance, with 400 men, the Lao Dong could have dispatched 10 organizers to each of South Vietnam's provinces. From all indications, organizers were sent South in 1958; the numbers are not known. Similarly, in all likelihood the DRV would have looked to base preparations. Again evidence is scanty, but there were definite indications that guerrilla secure-areas were being prepared in the Highlands, in the Plain of Reeds, and in the War Zone C - War Zone D region north of Saigon. 183/

There are also indications, however, that debate over strategy continued through 1958. Reports captured while being forwarded via Lao Dong channels from South Vietnam to Hanoi indicate that some subordinates there clung to the belief that the Diem regime could be toppled without recourse to guerrilla warfare, and that others despaired of success without substantial military aid from the North. There is also evidence throughout 1958 that Viet Cong tactics were being subjected to careful study in Hanoi. 184/

Whatever preparations were in progress during 1958, in December, 1958, or January, 1959, Hanoi apparently decided that the time had come to intensify its efforts. On December 1, there was an incident at a "political re-education camp" north of Saigon -- the "Phu Loi Massacre" -- which the DRV promptly seized upon to launch a worldwide propaganda offensive against Diem. U.S. intelligence came into possession of a directive from Hanoi to its subordinate headquarters in Inter-Sector V during December, 1958, which stated that the Lao Dong Party Central Committee had decided to "open a new stage of the struggle" 185/; the following month, January, 1959, U.S. sources also acquired an order directing a Viet Cong build-up in Tay Ninh province to provide a base for guerrilla operations; the same order mentioned similar bases in the mountains of western Inter-Sector V. 186/



In February, Viet Cong guerrillas successfully attacked a GVN outpost near Trang Sup, in Tay Ninh, and Diem told a French correspondent that "at the present time Vietnam is a nation at war." George Carver has recorded that in late 1958 or early 1959, Le Duan journeyed to South Vietnam for an on-the-spot appraisal of affairs there, and that his report lead to a DRV decision to step up support of the insurgency.

"Consolidation of the North" proceeded apace during 1958. Societal discipline advanced to the point that by early 1959 the land reform campaign -- under a different name -- was re-initiated without difficulty. 187/ Crops were good, and economic prospects in both the agricultural and industrial sectors were excellent. 188/ In January, 1959, the DRV contracted with the Soviet Union for a 50% increase in trade, and in February another large loan was negotiated with the CPR. 189/ Against this background of domestic success -- progress and plenty within North Vietnam -- and of international finesse -- cooperation with both the great communist powers without domination by either -- the DRV implemented the next step in its strategy.

#### 4. Taking the Offensive: Spring, 1959 - Fall, 1960.

##### a. Surfacing the Strategy, 1959

However the DRV privately viewed the war in South Vietnam during 1959 and 1960, the public statements of its leaders were aggressive. If the numbers of infiltrators and the amount of supplies dispatched to the South were insignificant or unimpressive to the beleaguered insurgents, the pose adopted by the Lao Dong principals must have greatly enheartened insurgents in South Vietnam.

On 4 April 1959, President Eisenhower, in an address at Gettysburg, declared that South Vietnam could not, without U.S. aid, "meet the dual threat of aggression from without and subversion within its borders." He stated that U.S. national interests compelled the U.S. to help South Vietnam sustain its morale, economic progress, and military strength. 190/ On 30 April 1959, Pham Van Dong applauded Khrushchev's rejoinder to President Eisenhower as follows:

"Comrade Khrushchev's strong statement was a powerful blow to the US imperialists aggressive bloc. The Vietnamese people are very grateful to the Soviet Union, head of the socialist camp, for its constant sympathy for and support to their righteous struggle for national reunification. Comrade Khrushchev's statement powerfully encourages our people to enthusiastically build North Viet-Nam and advance gradually toward socialism and to struggle for national reunification . . .

"Just as observed by Comrade Khrushchev, the intervention by US imperialism in South Viet-Nam is the cause of the continued partition of Viet-Nam . . . The struggle for the reunification

of our country is still meeting with difficulties and hardships, but we are confident that the Vietnamese people . . . will certainly triumph in the complete liberation of our country from the US-Diem clique's dictatorial yoke just as they had gloriously succeeded in their valiant struggle in the past. The American imperialists and their lackeys, who are being opposed and isolated, surely will not be able to avoid the ignominious defeat of those who go counter to the march of history." 191/

Ho Chi Minh's May Day speech of 1959 opened with an encomium from the Soviet Union, China, and other socialist powers who were promoting the movement for national liberation in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. According to the Hanoi Radio report, Ho pointed out "that the earnest desire of the Vietnamese people from North to South is peace and national reunification. On orders from the U.S. imperialists the South Vietnamese authorities are sabotaging the implementation of the Geneva Accords and strangling all democratic freedom of the southern people." Ho concluded on the note that:

"Under the leadership of the Viet-Nam Lao Dong Party and the government, all our people will further strengthen solidarity and unity of mind with other countries in the socialist camp, headed by the great Soviet Union . . . [and] strengthen solidarity within the national united front . . . By so doing the north of our country will steadily advance toward socialism as a strong basis toward victory in the struggle for national reunification."

On 4 May 1959, the official DRV newspaper declared that:

"The glorious South Vietnamese people surely will not remain with folded arms before the continuous and cruel repressive acts of the U.S.-Diem clique. The Vietnamese people have many times compelled their enemies to pay for their bloody crimes. The U.S.-Diem clique has by its own will contracted a big debt of blood toward the Vietnamese people, and have dug their own graves."

The foregoing were issued while the Lao Dong Party conducted the Fifteenth Plenum (Enlarged Session) of its Central Committee in Hanoi. The session featured speeches on foreign and domestic programs, but it is fairly certain that a Plenum of the Lao Dong Central Committee is not a debating society nor a parliament -- decisions were not reached there, they were presented.

On 13 May 1959, Hanoi broadcast in English the communique of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee; on the Plenum, a bellicose tone was unmistakable:



"The Central Committee of the Vietnam Lao Dong Party has held its 15th enlarged session to review the developments in the struggle for national reunification and lay down the tasks for the whole party and people in connection with that struggle . . .

"North Vietnam, now completely liberated, has carried through its task of national people's democratic revolution and is carrying out the socialist revolution and building socialism. This is an extremely important change which determines the direction of development of the Vietnamese revolution in the new stage. Meanwhile, the southern part of our country is still under the domination of the American imperialists and their lackey -- Ngo Dinh Diem. They have turned South Vietnam into a new-type colony and a military base for preparing war . . .

"The interventionist policy of the U.S. imperialists and the South Vietnam authorities' policy of dependence on the United States have undermined and deliberately continue to undermine the implementation of the Geneva agreements and the cause of peaceful national reunification, thus cutting across the desire and interests of the Vietnamese people. The U.S. imperialists and their followers are scheming to perpetuate the division of our country and prepare a new war.

"To carry out this perfidious scheme, over the past few years the U.S.-Diem clique has been actively increasing its military forces, carrying out a policy of ruthless exploitation of the people, abolishing all democratic functions, repressing and terrorizing the people in a most barbarous manner, causing ever more serious dislocation of the South Vietnamese economy, and making the life of local people more and more precarious and wretched . . .

"To achieve national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy, the session mapped out the following tasks: the entire people will unite and strive to struggle for national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy to endeavor to consolidate the North and actively take it step by step toward socialism, to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, prosperous and strong Vietnam; and to contribute to the safeguarding of peace in Southeast Asia and the world.

"The session expressed its unshakable belief that our whole people, uniting and struggling heroically and

perseveringly, will certainly smash the U.S. imperialists' scheme to seize our land and their lackeys' plot to sell out our country. On the basis of the consolidation of North Vietnam and its steady development in all fields, of the broad and powerful development of the patriotic movement in the South, and with the approval and support of the peace loving people all over the world, our struggle for national reunification will certainly be successful."

The following day the official press carried an editorial (also broadcast by Radio Hanoi in English) commenting on the communique:

"At present, the world and home situation has become basically different from that of the past. It has been developing in a way which is fully advantageous to our people and very disadvantageous to the imperialists and their lackeys. Our strength in all fields in the North, which is the firm base for the revolutionary struggle in the South, has constantly been consolidated and increased. The magnificently heroic struggle of the southern people has constantly developed and their united strength has broadened without a halt. Strength in all fields of the socialist camp has grown majestically.

"On the basis of an unprecedentedly firm North Vietnam and socialist camp, our compatriots in the south will struggle resolutely and persistently against the cruel U.S.-Diem regime . . .

"Our people, always cherishing peace, are determined to struggle to compel the other side to carry out correctly the Geneva agreements, to re-establish normal North-South relations and to hold consultations on general elections to reunify the country. However, our people are determined not to give the imperialists and feudalists a free hand to oppose our people's aspirations and to keep the southerners in slavery. Our people are determined to struggle with their traditional heroism by all necessary forms and measures so as to achieve the goal of the revolution."

On 10 July 1959, the Belgian Communist publication Red Flag published an article under Ho Chi Minh's by-line which reported that:

"We are building socialism in Viet-Nam, but we are building it in only one part of the country, while in the other part we still have to direct and bring to a close middle-class democratic and anti-imperialist revolution." 192/



On 8 July 1959, the United States armed forces sustained the first combat deaths in the war: two U.S. servicemen were killed by a terrorist bomb inside a U.S. compound at Bien Hoa. Other Viet Cong terrorist activities mounted to new levels of intensity. In the fall of 1959, as recounted above, communist guerrillas began to attack openly units of the Army of Vietnam, and to occupy province and district capitals for short periods. 193/ On 12 September 1959, Premier Pham Van Dong told the French Consul in Hanoi, that:

"You must remember; we will be in Saigon tomorrow, we will be in Saigon tomorrow." 194/

In November, 1959, Pham Van Dong twice told Canadian ICC Commissioner Ericksen-Brown that "we will drive the Americans in the sea" -- statements deemed significant enough by the Lao Dong hierarchy to elicit a visit from General Giap to "reassure" Ericksen-Brown of the DRV's peaceful intent. 195/

But the U.S. and Diem were both inured to threatening communist invective; what should have been more ominous was the DRV's willingness to act, first evident in Laos.

#### b. DRV Intervention in Laos

During the First Indochina War, 1945-1954, a nominally independent national movement developed in Laos, the paramilitary Pathet Lao, and its political arm, the Lao Fatherland Front (Neo Lao Hak Xat). 196/ It was quite clear, however, that the Viet Minh -- and the Lao Dong Party -- dominated the Resistance in Laos; in fact, the Viet Minh negotiated the Geneva settlement on behalf of its Laotian allies. After the Accords were signed, some Laotians were regrouped to North Vietnam itself, and like the South Vietnamese, were formed into NVA units. In 1954-1955, the DRV openly assisted the Pathet Lao in consolidating political and military strength in Phong Saly and Sam Neua, two provinces on Laos' northeast border with North Vietnam, designated as regroupment zones by the Geneva Agreements. 197/ U.S. intelligence obtained evidence that DRV cadres remained in these provinces following regroupment, some as advisors, but some occupying key political and administrative positions in the Pathet Lao and Neo Lao Hak Xat. Captured documents indicate that a North Vietnamese headquarters for this effort was set up in Laos, with the following missions assigned from Hanoi:

(1) implementation of the truce and the political struggle;

(2) establishment and training of the Laotian (Communist) Party;

(3) assistance in fiscal matters; and

(4) improvement of Pathet Lao military forces.

A captured report to Hanoi, probably from this headquarters, indicated that by 1956 the Laotian Communist Party had expanded from less than 100 to more than 2,000 members, and that a light infantry, guerrilla force of more than fifteen battalions had been created. Apparently, Hanoi had planned to withdraw the Vietnamese cadre in late 1956, and there is evidence that some withdrawals took place by early 1957; there is also evidence that most DRV cadre remained. However, in 1957, with the aid of the ICC, a political settlement was reached. Two battalions of Pathet Lao surrendered to the Royal Laotian Government (RLG), to be incorporated into its army, and the Pathet Lao agreed to demobilize 5,000 other troops. Two officials of the Lao Fatherland Front were admitted to the Royal Laotian Government, and the movement ostensibly integrated into the national community.

During 1958 and early 1959, the Royal Laotian Government became increasingly pro-Western, and DRV activities in Laos were evidently attenuated. However, in May, 1959, when the Royal Laotian Army (RLA) attempted to disestablish its two Pathet Lao battalions, one escaped and marched for the DRV. DRV reaction was quick. Immediately thereafter U.S. intelligence was reliably informed that a military headquarters similar to the Viet Minh's Dien Bien Phu command post had been set up near the Laos border to control operations in Laos by the NVA 335th Division, which had been formed from the "Lao Volunteers" regrouped to the DRV in 1955. 198/ From mid-1959 onwards, the U.S. acquired convincing evidence of an increasing DRV military involvement in Laos, and beginning in late 1960, of USSR entry into the conflict with substantial military aid for the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao aided by a severe weakening of the RLG from a neutralist coup by Kong Le in 1961, and a counter coup by right-wing forces in 1962, mounted an offensive against the RLG to expand Pathet Lao controlled territory, which continued through a "cease-fire" of May, 1961.

It was not, however, until December, 1960, that the DRV announced to foreign diplomats resident in Hanoi its decision to intervene in Laos; during 1961 the DRV presence in Laos was transformed from a semi-covert MAAG-like undertaking to an operational theater. Beginning in December, 1960, and throughout 1961 and early 1962, Soviet aircraft flew 2,000 to 3,000 sorties from the DRV to Laos, delivering more than 3,000 tons of supplies to communist forces, which expanded their territory to hold the northern half of the country. Ethnic North Vietnamese appeared in Pathet Lao formations, and Kong Le himself admitted that NVA officers and soldiers were serving as "technicians" with his paratroops. North Vietnamese from NVA formations were captured by RLG forces and captured documents substantiated the presence of entire NVA units. In December, 1961, a convoy of Soviet-made tanks was sighted entering Laos



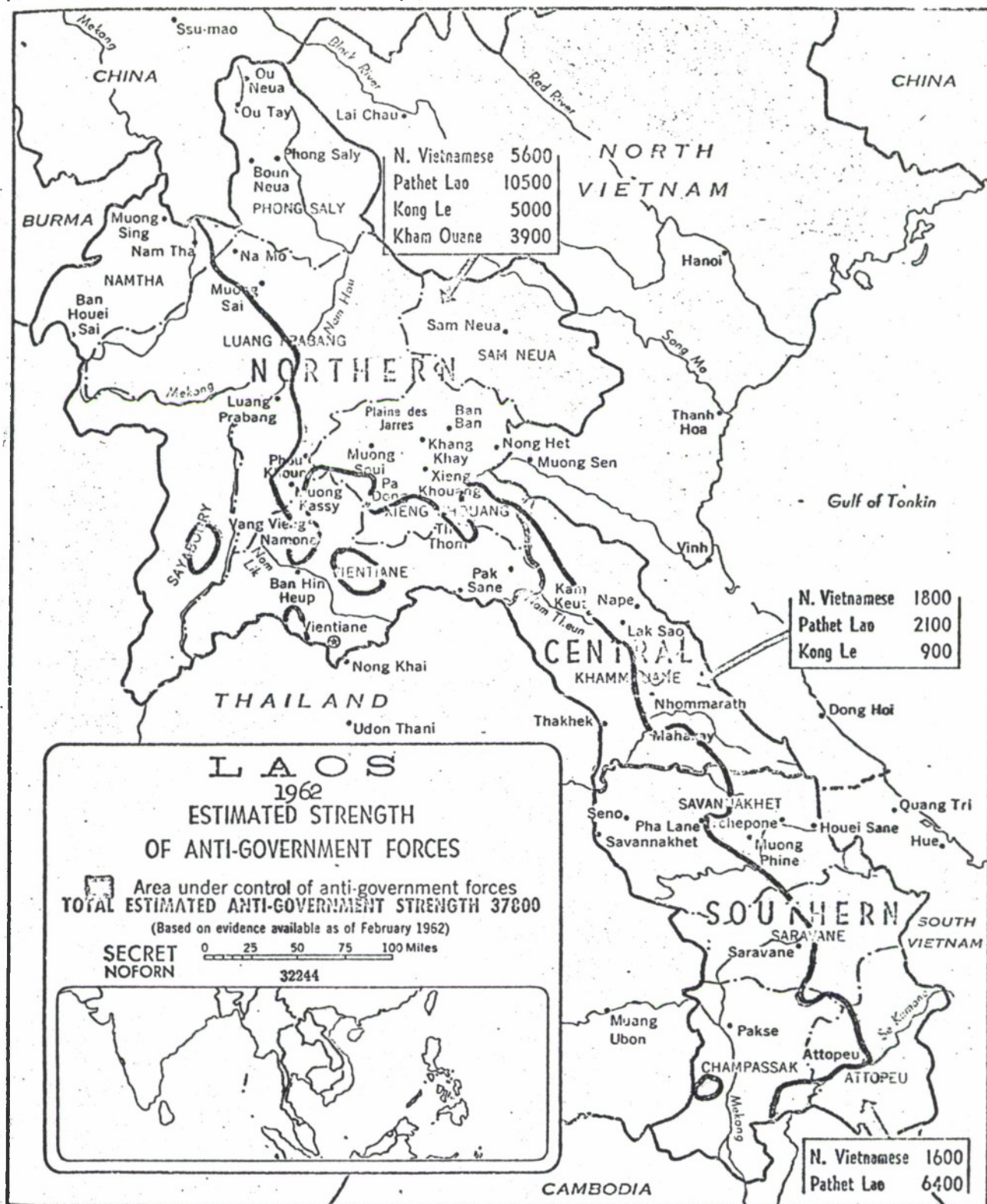
from the DRV, and shortly thereafter DRV officials formally presented 45 tanks to Kong Le. U.S. aerial photography identified also Soviet-made artillery and radar in use by the Pathet Lao. Truck convoys of 20 to 300 vehicles were observed entering Laos carrying munitions, rice, motor fuel, and NVA troops. Altogether, the combined communist forces demonstrated significant military superiority over the RIG forces. Rightist forces (under Phoumi Nosavan), U.S. military aid notwithstanding, were markedly unsuccessful in stemming the communist drive. In May, 1961, a truce was struck, and the conflict was carried into international conference; at Geneva on 23 July 1962, a new political settlement was reached. As of that period, U.S. intelligence reported 12 NVA battalions in Laos, some 6,000 strong. In addition, 3,000 NVA personnel were serving with PL units. 199/

The Geneva Agreement on Laos of 1962 consisted of joint declaration by the several nations concerned with Indochina -- including the U.S., the DRV, and the GVN -- agreeing that Laos would be neutralized:

"All foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel shall be withdrawn from Laos . . . the introduction of foreign regular and irregular troops, foreign para-military formations and foreign military personnel into Laos of armaments, munitions, and war materiel generally, except such quantities as the Royal Government of Laos may consider necessary for the national defense of Laos, is prohibited . . ."

In concert with the Pathet Lao, the DRV circumvented these agreements. Although measures were taken to conceal DRV presence and ostensibly to withdraw DRV forces -- 40 North Vietnamese were removed under ICC observation -- U.S. intelligence obtained good evidence, including a number of eye witness statements, that the bulk of the NVA forces remained in Laos; U.S. estimates placed NVA strength in Laos in early 1963 at 4,000 troops in 8 battalions, plus 2,000 Pathet Lao advisors. 200/

In any event, by late 1960 the DRV could look upon its Laotian enterprise as successful in substantially expanding its sphere of influence in Laos, to include control over the territory adjacent to South Vietnam over which passed its "Ho Chi Minh Trail" of infiltration (see map). Eventually the enterprise brought about withdrawal of the U.S. military presence from Laos, per the Geneva Agreement of 1962. If the Vientiane government, braced with broad U.S. aid, surprised the DRV with its resiliency, it at least proved unable to challenge the Pathet Lao -- and DRV -- gains. Whatever the DRV longer term goal in Laos, reunification of Vietnam seemed thereafter to take priority over further extension in Laos. In any event, the DRV succeeded in securing its Laotian frontier from U.S. or Laotian



Source:  
 SNIE 10-62  
 21 Feb 1962  
 p. 11



efforts to mobilize the tribal peoples against it, and in opening access to South Vietnam via the Laotian panhandle.

It is not clear whether the DRV found it necessary to pressure or subvert the Cambodian government in order to bring it into line with its general strategy, but align the Cambodians did. As in Laos, the Viet Minh had fronted for Khmer Resistance at the Geneva Conference of 1954, and there is evidence that in the years following it supported subversive organizations in Cambodia. In 1958, a crisis between South Vietnam and Cambodia erupted over boundary disputes and border violations. Cambodia formally laid claim to all of Cochinchina in a declaration to the United Nations, while South Vietnam laid claim to off-shore islands and other nominally Cambodian territory.

Beginning in 1958, Cambodia declared for "neutralism," and thereafter its relations with the DRV were marked with increasing cordiality and cooperativeness. Evidence collected since 1963 indicates that the Viet Cong built bases adjacent to the Cambodian border, used sanctuary areas across it, operated trans-frontier supply routes, and had sources of supply within Cambodia. Insofar as the minimal evident objectives of DRV policy were concerned -- use of Cambodian territory to further the campaign to reunify Vietnam -- Cambodia proved to be incapable of interfering even when, apparently, it wished to police its territory. 201/

#### c. Explication of the Strategy, 1960

During 1958 and 1959 work had progressed on a revision of the DRV Constitution. On 1 January 1960, with much fanfare, the new basic law was promulgated. The Preamble recounted the modern history of Vietnam, in part as follows:

"Vietnam is a single entity from Lang-Son to Camau.

"The Vietnamese people, throughout the thousands of years of history, have been an industrious working people who have struggled unrelentingly and heroically to build their country and defend the independence of their Fatherland . . . With the Dien Bien Phu victory, the Vietnamese people defeated the French imperialists and the U.S. interventionists . . .

"This major success of the Vietnamese people was also a common success of the liberation movement of the oppressed peoples, of the world front of peace, and of the socialist camp.

"Since the restoration of peace in completely liberated North Viet-Nam, our people have carried through the National People's Democratic Revolution. But the South is still under

the rule of the imperialists and feudalists; our country is still temporarily divided into two zones . . .

"The Vietnamese revolution has moved into a new position. Our people must endeavor to consolidate the North, taking it toward socialism, and carry on the struggle for peaceful reunification of the country and completion of the tasks of the National People's Democratic revolution throughout the country.

"In the last few years, our peoples in the North have achieved many big successes in economic rehabilitation and cultural development. At present, socialist transformation and construction are being successfully carried out.

"Meanwhile, in the South, the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen have been savagely repressing the patriotic movement of our people. They have been strengthening military forces and carrying out their scheme of turning the southern part of our country into a colony and military base for their war preparations . . . But our southern compatriots have constantly struggled heroically and refused to submit to them. The people throughout the country, united as one, are holding aloft the banners of peace, national unity, independence, and democracy, resolved to march forward and win final victory. The cause of the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland will certainly be victorious." 202/

Strangely, even so formal a statement of aims escaped attention in the West, even though the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia had now become sufficiently grave to cause concern throughout the world. Within the U.S. Government, extensive reappraisals of U.S. policy were launched. Aid to Laos was stepped-up, and the U.S. country team in Vietnam was directed to prepare a counter-insurgency plan for bringing U.S. aid more efficiently to bear the GVN's internal defense. The inflamed situation in Laos and South Vietnam were among the major international irritants toward which hopes for the Summit Conference in Paris in May, 1960, were directed. The breakdown of the Paris talks, and the subsequent hardening of relations between the United States and the USSR, formed the backdrop against which the Soviets moved into deeper commitment to support of the DRV, and the DRV into more open support of the insurgents in South Vietnam.

In early September, 1960, the Lao Dong Party held its Third Congress, and passed the following resolution:

"In the present stage, the Vietnamese revolution has two strategic tasks: first, to carry out the socialist revolution in North Viet-Nam; second, to liberate South Vietnam from the ruling yolk of the U.S. imperialists and



their henchmen in order to achieve national unity and complete independence and freedom throughout the country. These two strategic tasks are closely related to each other and spur each other forward . . .

"The two revolutionary tasks of the North and South belong to two different strategies, each task being aimed at satisfying the definite requirement of each zone under the specific conditions of our divided country. But these two tasks have one common aim -- to achieve peaceful national reunification and resolve one common contradiction of our whole country -- the contradiction between our people and the imperialists and their henchmen.

"The common task of the Vietnamese revolution at present is: to strengthen the unity of all the people; to struggle resolutely to maintain peace, to accelerate the socialist revolution in North Viet-Nam while at the same time stepping up the National People's Democratic Revolution in South Viet-Nam; . . .

"The revolution in the South is a protracted, hard, and complex process of struggle, combining many forms of struggle of great activity and flexibility, ranging from lower to higher, and taking as its basis the building, consolidation and development of the revolutionary power of the masses. During this process we must pay special attention to the work of organizing and educating the people, first and foremost the workers, peasants and intellectuals, promoting to the highest degree the revolutionary fighting spirit of the various strata of our patriotic countrymen. We must unceasingly expose the criminal schemes and acts of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen, doing our utmost to divide and isolate them.

"To insure the complete success of the revolutionary struggle in South Viet-Nam our people there must strive to establish a united bloc of workers, peasants, and soldiers and to bring into being a broad national united front directed against the U.S.-Dien clique and based on the worker-peasant alliance. This front must rally all the patriotic parties and religious groupings, together with all individuals inclined to oppose the U.S.-Dien clique. The aims of its struggle are peace, national independence, democratic freedoms, improvement of the people's living conditions, and peaceful national reunification.

"The front must carry out its work in a very flexible manner in order to rally all forces that can be rallied, win over all forces that can be won over, neutralize all forces that should be neutralized, and draw the broad masses into the general struggle against the US-Diem clique for the liberation of the South and the peaceful reunification of the fatherland.

"The revolutionary movement in the South plays a very important role in relation to the reunification of the country. Simultaneously with the effort to build the North and advance toward socialism our people must strive to maintain and develop the revolutionary forces in the South and create favorable conditions for peaceful national reunification...." 203/

Ho Chi Minh, in his speech at the Congress, attributed the "victory of the Vietnamese revolution" in part to the "whole-hearted assistance of the fraternal socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union and China." He identified the DRV with the world "forces of peace" and stated that "the Democratic Republic of Vietnam is a member of the big socialist family headed by the great Soviet Union." 204/ Giap's speech at the Congress cited the example of the August, 1945, general uprisings, noting that victory came because "our party kept a firm hold on the national democratic revolutionary line," and paid appropriate attention to preparing the people for their tasks. Le Duan's address stressed that:

"The southern people's revolutionary struggle will be long, drawn out, and arduous. It is not a simple process but a complicated one, combining many varied forms of struggle -- from elementary to advanced, legal and illegal -- and based on the building, consolidation and development of the revolutionary force of the masses. In this process, we must constantly intensify our solidarity and the organization and education of the people of the South...and must uphold the revolutionary fighting spirit of all strata of patriotic compatriots." 205/

Le Duan also called for a "worker-peasant-army coalition bloc," and a "broad national united front against the US-Diem clique."

In a policy-cycle similar to that of 1957 -- strategy announced around September, followed by international exposure and confirmation at Moscow in November -- the DRV obtained at the "Conference of Representatives of Communist and Workers' Parties" held in Moscow in November, 1960, fairly explicit endorsement of its line of action in South Vietnam. As in 1957, the Moscow Declaration distinguished between war in general and anti-colonial wars, noting that "national-liberation revolutions have triumphed in vast areas of the world" and emphasized that:



"The complete collapse of colonialism is inevitable. The downfall of the system of colonial slavery under the impact of the national-liberation movement is a phenomenon ranking second in historical importance after the formation of the world system of socialism."

"The United States of America is the chief bulwark of present-day colonialism...."

"....the working class of many capitalist countries, by overcoming the split in its ranks and achieving unity of action of all its detachments, could deliver a heavy blow to the policy of the ruling circles of the capitalist countries and force them to step up preparations for a new war, repel the offensive of monopoly capital, and ensure satisfaction of its vital everyday and democratic demands."

"....The Communist Parties, guided by Marxist-Leninist teaching, have always been against the export of revolution. At the same time, they resolutely struggle against imperialist export of counter-revolution. They consider it their international duty to call on the peoples of all countries to unite, to mobilize all their internal forces, to act vigorously and, relying on the might of the world socialist system, to prevent or decisively rebuff the interference of the imperialists in the affairs of the people of any country who have risen in revolution."

"The Communist Parties reaffirm the propositions of the 1957 Declaration concerning the question of the forms of transition of various countries from capitalism to socialism."

"In conditions when the exploiting classes resort to the use of force against the people, it is necessary to bear in mind another possibility--that of nonpeaceful transition to socialism. Leninism teaches, and historical experience confirms, that the ruling classes do not relinquish power voluntarily. In these conditions the degree of bitterness and the forms of the class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the extent of the resistance of the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on the use of force by these circles at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism." 206/

It is interesting, in the light of the foregoing, to read the Communist Party history, written in South Vietnam around 1963 and captured on Operation CRIMP in 1966 (see Tab 2, p. 51 ff.). While such a history must be regarded with caution--Soviet historians have not hesitated to establish that the Bolsheviks overthrew the Czar--the CRIMP history, consistent with other captured documents and prisoner interrogations, dates the insurgency in South Vietnam from the Lao Dong Party conclave of May, 1959:

"...Particularly after 20 July 1956, the key cadres and Party members in South Vietnam asked questions which demanded answers: 'Can we still continue the struggle to demand the implementation of Geneva Agreement given the existing regime in South Vietnam? If not, then what must be done?' A mood of skepticism and non-confidence in the orientation of the struggle began to seep into the party apparatus and among some of the masses.

"At the end of 1956 the popularization of the volume by Comrade Duan [Le Duan] entitled 'The South Vietnam Revolutionary Path'\* was of great significance because the ideological crisis was now solved. After analyzing the character of the South Vietnam society, the character of the American-Diemist enemy etc., the volume outlined a new strategic orientation for the South Vietnam revolution, a strategic mission in which everyone could have some confidence: It is necessary to continue the national democratic revolution in South Vietnam and it is necessary to use force to overthrow the feudalist imperialist regime in order to establish a revolutionary democratic coalition and create the conditions for the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.

"After the Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee was issued all of South Vietnam possessed a clear and correct strategic policy and orientation. The Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee\*\* clearly delineated the general responsibility of the Vietnam revolution, analyzed the special characteristics of the South Vietnam situation, clearly spelled out the revolutionary tasks in South Vietnam and at the same time outlined the path which the South Vietnam revolution should take.

"Thanks to this correct and clear delineation of the strategic orientation and path, the South Vietnam people and party clearly understood the aims and enlightened path to follow....The volume 'South Vietnam Revolutionary Path' and the Resolution of the Fifteenth Conference of the Central Committee provided the cadres and Party members with a pair of wings with which to fly and lamps to shine upon the path ahead, a feeling of encouragement and confidence, a determined will because the goals were clear and the path bright....

"Since the end of 1958, particularly after the Phu Loi Massacre, the situation truly ripened for an armed movement against the enemy. But the leadership of the Nam-Bo Regional Committee at that time still hesitated for many reasons, but the principal reason was the fear of violating the party line. The directive of the politburo in May 1959 stated that the time had come to push the arms struggle against the enemy. Thanks to this we closely followed the actual

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\* Not available.

\*\* Reference is to the 15th Plenum of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee



situation in order to formulate a program which we felt would be essential, and in October 1959, the armed struggle was launched.

"Was the armed struggle slow in coming? We realize that it was not possible to launch the arms struggle too soon, before the situation had ripened. At any rate, a short period of time was lost because although many areas were engaged in armed propaganda /terror-backed persecution/ up to this time, it was limited to armed propaganda and insufficient strength existed to maintain continued opposition to the enemy. Although slow in coming, it was not too slow because there was still time to transform the situation into one where the proper conditions existed. However, if the change had been even slower, even more difficulties would have been encountered and the change in the movement would not have been as easy."

"The Resolution of the 15th Conference of the Central Committee officially and concisely specified the responsibilities and strategic aims of the South Vietnam revolution.

"But problems still existed: how were these responsibilities, aims, and progress of the South Vietnam revolution to be implemented? What must the main forms and procedures of the struggle be? Although the Resolution outlined some of these factors, at the time of the Conference, the details of the South Vietnam movement as well as revolutionary experiences of friendly nations were not sufficient enough for the Conference to formulate a precise program. Only 2 years later, were there sufficient factors available, based partly on the experiences of Laos but mainly on the experiences of the South Vietnam revolutionary movement, the Central Committee was able to formulate a clear and concise program concerning these problems...."

The latter reference is to a January, 1961, Resolution of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, which directed concentration on peasant problems, stressed political action--"The political aspect is truly the basic one," said the CRIMP history--and warned against "revisionism." The Lao Dong newspaper carried an editorial, broadcast by Radio Hanoi on 13 January 1961 which described the 1961 Resolution as a document which:

"Reaffirms and sheds more light on the thesis of the Declaration of 1957 concerning the forms of transition from capitalism to socialism in different countries and clearly points to the lines and methods of struggle of the communist parties of capitalist countries...."

"As for the colonial countries, the statement points out that the struggle for national independence should be waged through armed struggles or by non-military methods, according to the specific conditions in the country concerned. The working class, which plays a major role in the national liberation struggle, is determined to

carry through the tasks of the national and democratic revolution against all schemes of reaction to hinder progress of society...."

"The Declaration of the Conference of Representatives of Communists and Workers' Parties in Moscow in 1957, and the new statement are a profound summary of the experiences of revolutionary struggle and of building a new life of our time. They represent a development of Marxism-Leninism for the new conditions of history." 207/

But none of the communist statements--neither the Moscow Declaration of 1957, nor that of 1960; neither the Lao Dong Resolution of September, 1960, nor that of January, 1961--attracted much attention in the West. Neither did the Manifesto of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, proclaimed, in December, 1960, seemingly in response to the Lao Dong Third Congress Resolution. But N. S. Khrushchev made news with his 6 January 1961 "wars of national liberation" speech. Khrushchev's remarks were actually little more than a precis of the Moscow Declarations of 1957 and 1960; nonetheless, they shocked the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., in his "A Thousand Days," declared that Khrushchev's "elaborate speech...made a conspicuous impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff, and read excerpts from it aloud to the National Security Council....Underneath the canonical beat of language, the oration sounding a brutal joy over a world where democracy was everywhere on the retreat and communism everywhere on the march." 208/ The President and his principal cabinet officers returned to this speech again and again in their explanations of Administration policy. 209/

Khrushchev offered an analysis of the world situation as it appeared at the beginning of the 1960's and declared that, as of that moment, "the prevention of a new war is the question of all questions." He described three categories of wars: "world wars, local wars, and liberation wars or popular uprisings." World wars, he declared, were unlikely. Local wars were also improbable. But, he said, "liberation wars and popular uprisings will continue to exist as long as imperialism exists...such wars are not only admissible but inevitable...an example...is the armed struggle of the Vietnamese people...." He asserted unequivocally that "the communists support just wars of this kind whole-heartedly and without reservation and they march in the van of the peoples fighting for repression." But Khrushchev's speech notwithstanding, by 1961 the strategic course of the DRV was well set, and the new President was already at war in South Vietnam with the DRV.



U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSURGENCY, 1954-1960

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PRINCIPAL PERSONALITIES, 1954-1960

UNITED STATES

<u>OFFICE</u>	<u>TERM OF OFFICE</u>	<u>NAME</u>
President	20 Jan 1953 - 20 Jan 1961	Dwight D. Eisenhower
Secretary of State	21 Jan 1953 - 15 Apr 1959	John Foster Dulles
"	16 Apr 1959 - 20 Jan 1961	Christian A. Herter
Ambassador to GVN	25 Jun 1952 - 20 Apr 1955	Donald R. Heath
"	20 Apr 1955 - 14 Mar 1957	G. Frederick Reinhardt
"	14 Mar 1957 - 14 Mar 1961	Elbridge Durbrow
Secretary of Defense	28 Jan 1953 - 8 Oct 1957	Charles E. Wilson
"	9 Oct 1957 - 2 Dec 1959	Neil H. McElroy
"	3 Dec 1959 - 8 Jan 1961	Thomas S. Gates, Jr.
Chairman, JCS	14 Aug 1953 - 15 Aug 1957	Admiral Arthur W. Radford, USN
"	15 Aug 1957 - 30 Sep 1960	General Nathan F. Twining, USAF
"	1 Oct 1960 - 30 Sep 1962	General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA
Chief of Staff, Army	15 Aug 1953 - 30 Jun 1965	General Matthew B. Ridgway
"	30 Jun 1955 - 30 Jun 1959	General Maxwell D. Taylor
"	1 Jul 1959 - 30 Sep 1960	General Lyman L. Lemnitzer
"	1 Oct 1960 - 30 Sep 1962	General George H. Decker
Chief of Naval Operations	16 Aug 1953 - 17 Aug 1955	Admiral Robert B. Carney
"	17 Aug 1955 - 31 Jul 1961	Admiral Arleigh A. Burke
Chief of Staff, Air Force	30 Jun 1953 - 30 Jun 1957	General Nathan F. Twining
"	1 Jul 1957 - 30 Jun 1961	General Thomas D. White
Commandant, Marine Corps	28 Jun 1952 - 31 Dec 1955	General Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr.
"	1 Jan 1956 - 31 Dec 1959	General Randolph McC. Pate
"	1 Jan 1960 - 31 Dec 1963	General David M. Shoup
Chief, MAAG	24 Oct 1955 - 31 Aug 1960	Lt. Gen. Samuel T. Williams, USA
"	1 Sep 1960 - 5 Mar 1962	Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, USA

GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM

Head of State/President	Mar 1949 - 26 Oct 1955	Emperor Bao Dai
"	26 Oct 1955 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem
Prime Minister	12 Jan 1954 - 16 Jun 1954	Prince Buu Loc
"	7 Jul 1954 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem
Minister of Foreign Affairs/ Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs	17 Dec 1953 - 16 Jun 1954	Nguyen Quoc Dinh
"	5 Jul 1954 - May 1955	Tran Van Do
"	Jul 1955 - 1 Nov 1963	Vu Van Mau
Minister of Defense/Minister of National Defense	25 Jun 1952 - 1954(?)	Ngien Van Tri
"	5 Jul 1954 - 1 Nov 1963	Ngo Dinh Diem



U.S. PERCEPTIONS OF THE INSURGENCY, 1954-1960

A. U.S. Intelligence, 1954-1959

In electing to support Ngo Dinh Diem in 1954 and 1955, and to assume responsibilities from France for providing economic and military assistance to South Vietnam in the years thereafter, the United States deliberately set out to establish in South Vietnam a political environment markedly different from that which France had fostered in the period 1945-54. In 1960, however, there were still similarities to the French period, and these were perhaps more fundamental than were differences.

1. Pre-Geneva, 1950-1954

The pattern that was to confront the U.S. throughout the 1950's was noted in a National Intelligence Estimate of 29 December 1950 (NIE-5), which began: "The French position in Indochina is critically in danger by the Viet Minh, a communist movement that has exploited native nationalism." Under the circumstances prevailing, "there is only a slight chance that the French can maintain their military position long enough to build up an independent Vietnamese government and an effective national army which might win the support of non-communist nationalists, and, in conjunction with French forces, contain the Viet Minh." Despite French efforts to weaken the political, nationalistic base of the Viet Minh by supporting "a semi-autonomous pro-French government under native leadership, . . . concessions to nationalistic sentiment leading to full sovereignty for the Bao Dai government have been forthcoming so slowly and with such seeming reluctance on the part of the French, that the Bao Dai government has not in fact won a strong nationalistic following in any quarter. As a result the French so far have been unable to undermine the political strength of the Viet Minh."

Meanwhile, however, the Estimate noted that military pressure from the Viet Minh, assisted by the Chinese Communists, could eject the French from Tonkin, and ultimately from all of Vietnam; without a strengthening of the French military position, defeat seemed inevitable, even if the French and the Bao Dai government should begin to transform the political situation. A political mutation was essential to victory, and had to be timely were a military defeat to be averted. The NIE concluded that if Chinese Communist

were continued, and French strength and military resources were not substantially increased above those then programmed, "the Viet Minh probably can drive the French out of North Vietnam (Tonkin) within 6 to 9 months."

But half a year later, an NIE of 7 August 1951 (NIE-35, pp. 1-2), reported, "The present military situation in Indochina is one of stalemate." General de Lattre de Tassigny had repulsed the Viet Minh regime's drive to conquer Tonkin, this "success" resulting from a number of factors including French reinforcements, Viet Minh mistakes in their initial foray into large-scale conventional warfare, and "the timely arrival of U.S. military aid, including aircraft, napalm bombs, patrol and landing craft, and ground combat materiel," which had helped de Lattre "to inflict heavy losses on the Viet Minh . . ." But, the Estimate noted, "Political developments . . . have been less favorable . . ."

In other words, the French and Bao Dai showed no intention of using the time thus purchased by averting military defeat to bring about political progress: \*

" . . . Despite the gradual French transfer of certain responsibilities, the Vietnamese government has been slow to develop and has continued to suffer from a lack of strong leadership. It has had to contend with: (a) French reluctance to relinquish ultimate control of political and economic affairs; (b) lingering Vietnamese suspicion of any French-supported regime, combined with the apathetic and 'fence-sitting' attitude of the bulk of the people, which has deprived the government of broad-based popular support; (c) the difficulty common to all new and inexperienced governments, of training the necessary personnel and building an efficient administration; and (d) the failure of factional and sectional groups to unite in a concerted national effort.

"In January 1951 the opportunity arose of forming a broad-based cabinet representing most non-Communist group in Vietnam; instead Premier Huu formed a cabinet composed primarily of members of his own pro-French faction. Although Huu has displayed some administrative skill and his government has gained slowly in effectiveness, the weakness of the Huu cabinet and its alleged 'French puppet' status have limited its appeal to Vietnamese nationalism and have alienated strong nationalist groups, including the powerful Dai Viet group in Tonkin. Communist control of much of the country and Viet Minh infiltration of large areas under nominal French control have also discouraged many people from openly allying themselves with the government."

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\* In this and all following citations, italics are added, unless otherwise noted.



There had been more progress in efforts to create a national Vietnamese army, "an essential prerequisite to growth in the political stature of the Vietnamese government and to ultimate non-communist solution in Indochina," but "progress in the formation of the Army is retarded by lack of capable officers at all levels of command, shortages of equipment, and the apathetic attitude of the populace." (Weaknesses in officers -- in large part the policy of officer recruitment and promotion -- have fatally weakened Vietnamese army operations ever since.) In the end, the French neither built a genuinely Vietnamese army, nor allowed the native armed force any role or status which might have made it an effective adjunct of nationalism.

On the communist side, the estimate noted that:

"The communist party role has been strengthened, with strict party liners coming more into the foreground . . . in the absence of further military victories, Viet Minh popular support appears unlikely to increase . . . while we are unable to determine whether the Viet Minh is actually losing any of its popular appeal, the regime apparently is dependent more and more on tightened communist controls. . . . these tightened controls may prevent defections and facilitate the exploitation of people already under Viet Minh control."

Two years later, NIE-91 of 4 June 1953 continued to emphasize the critical problems of lack of support for the Bao Dai regime and lack of Indochinese will and ability to resist the Viet Minh. Some political progress could be pointed to during the preceding year, including local elections in secure areas, and decisions in March 1953 to increase the size of the Vietnamese National Army; and, a note that reads familiarly nearly fifteen years later:

"Another Vietnamese program, undertaken with U.S. economic assistance, which involves the relocation of scattered villages in the [Tonkin] delta into centralized and defensible sites may be an important step toward the eventual 'pacification' of heavily infiltrated areas."

However,

"Despite these advances, Vietnam still lacks the degree of political strength essential for the mobilization of the country's resources. Tam's 'action' program remains more shadow than substance. Elected local councils have no real power, promised land reform and other social and economic reforms which might generate popular support have not left

the planning stage, and the Vietnamese government is handicapped by incompetent cabinet ministers and the lack of competent administrators. While Bao Dai refuses to assume active direction of the affairs of state, he remains hostile toward new leadership and democratic activities."

"Of more basic importance in the failure of Vietnamese to rally to the Vietnamese government following the French grant of independence within the French Union in 1949 have been the following:

a. Many Vietnamese doubt the ability of French Union forces to defeat the Viet Minh and prefer to remain apart from the struggle.

b. The French Government had not dared to promise complete national independence at some future date, as demanded by the Vietnamese, because of the fear that the French national assembly would then refuse to support a war in a 'lost' portion of the French Union.

c. The Vietnamese, despite many evolutionary steps toward complete independence since 1949, are generally inclined to believe that the French intend to retain effective control over the affairs of Vietnam.

d. The nationalist appeal and military prestige of the Viet Minh remains strong among significant numbers of the Vietnamese."

## 2. Geneva, 1954

The Geneva Agreements of 1954 brought to an end nine years of open warfare between the French and the Viet Minh. In 1950, the conflict had been transformed from a purely colonial into a quasi-civil war, in which the Viet Minh found themselves pitted against a non-communist Vietnamese state with nominal independence, enjoying significant U.S. support. Nonetheless, the conflict was settled by the original protagonists: France and the DRV. As of the summer of 1954, U.S. assessments anticipated that a continuing French presence in Indochina would offset the Viet Minh menace in North Vietnam. The U.S. expected its own "political action" -- e.g., forming SEATO -- further to buttress "free Vietnam." Initially, at least, the U.S. looked on Diem as an unknown quantity with uncertain chances of succeeding against two sorts of challenges: the political turbulence within South Vietnam on the one hand, and on the other organized, communist-led remnants of the Viet Minh apparatus operating in concert with the DRV. In the years through 1960, estimates of the relative urgency of these two challenges varied. U.S. intelligence estimates rarely expressed confidence that Diem could overcome both



these threats, and usually the odds were judged to be against his surmounting either in the long run.

However, U.S. estimates in the immediate aftermath of Geneva held that a forceful direct communist challenge was unlikely through 1956. Diem was expected to enjoy a respite in which he could deal with other internal opposition, and shore up his government. Most estimates then concluded that the principal reason why the communists were unlikely to make an open challenge during that period was the very likelihood that Diem would prove unable to consolidate his power, and that South Vietnam would fall to the communists in the general elections scheduled for 1956, if not as a result of earlier internal turmoil. Thus, a National Intelligence Estimate of 3 August 1954 (NIE 63-5-54, p. 1) stated:

"We believe that the Communists will not give up their objective of securing control of all Indochina but will, without violating the armistice to the extent of launching an armed invasion to the south or west, pursue their objective by political, psychological, and paramilitary means."

"Although it is possible that the French and Vietnamese, even with firm support from the U.S. and other powers, may be able to establish a strong regime in South Vietnam, we believe that the chances for this development are poor and, moreover, that the situation is more likely to continue to deteriorate progressively over the next year. . . ."

In the light of the lessons of the first Indochinese War, the possibility of meeting the longer term challenge from the communists was seen as requiring not only the establishment of an efficient government in South Vietnam (thus circumventing the short-term tendencies toward chaos in the south), but a government under "strong Nationalist leadership," that could enlist the loyalty and active participation of the people in a united struggle against communist forces. This, in turn, at that time, was seen to depend on swift, firm, French action to back such leadership. But such a change in French policy appeared unlikely. (Ibid., p. 6)

"On the basis of the evidence we have at this early date, however, we believe that a favorable development of the situation in South Vietnam is unlikely. Unless Mendes-France is able to overcome the force of French traditional interests and emotions which have in the past governed the implementation of policy in Indochina, we do not believe there will be the dramatic transformation in French policy necessary to win the active loyalty and support of the local population for a South Vietnam Government. . . ."

As the year 1954 wore on, the near paralysis of the government and the increasing challenges to Diem's leadership from non-communist elements seemed increasingly to confirm the judgment U.S. estimates ascribed to the communists: that no forceful measures -- open violations of the Geneva Agreement, risking U.S. intervention -- would be necessary to achieve the eventual extension of DRV authority throughout Vietnam. These developments reinforced the U.S. expectation that the communists would stand back from open intervention, at least until the scheduled date of elections in July 1956.

Yet, as early as November, 1954, a National Estimate projected the likelihood that if -- contrary to expectations -- the communists should be denied a victory by political means on or before July 1956, they would turn to violent means, using their remaining apparatus in the south for terrorism and guerrilla action and reinforcing it by infiltration. According to NIE 63-7-54, 23 November 1954 (p. 9):

"We believe that the Viet Minh will continue to gain in political strength and prestige and, with Chinese aid, to increase its military striking power in North Vietnam. The Viet Minh probably now feels that it can achieve control over all Vietnam without initiating large-scale warfare. Accordingly, we believe that the Communists will exert every effort to accomplish their objectives through means short of war. . . ."

"If, on the other hand, South Vietnam should appear to be gaining in strength or if elections were postponed over Communist objections, the Communists probably would step up their subversive and guerrilla activities in the South and if necessary would infiltrate additional armed forces in an effort to gain control over the area. . . ."

As of late 1954, the Estimate stated the "present key to political power in South Vietnam" was still held by the French. "Under present circumstances, only the French can provide to the legitimate governing authority in Vietnam the power it now lacks, and force the coalescence of the various factions, groups, and individuals." (Ibid., p. 5) As for Diem himself: "Diem, the leading lay Catholic in Vietnam, is honest, austere, and widely respected for his integrity and nationalistic zeal. . . . However, Diem is rigid, unwilling to compromise, and inexperienced in the rough and tumble of politics. He is acutely suspicious of his colleagues on the political scene and is inclined to seek advice among a small group of relatives and close friends who, for the most part, are incapable of proffering sound counsel. . . . None of the groups opposing Diem has any broad-based popular support. It is the weakness of Diem rather than any genuine political strength of their own that enables them to prolong the political crisis in Saigon. . . ." (Ibid., p. 4)



The Estimate noted that the French might decide that in order to preserve their relationship with the U.S., "it is essential to support an anti-Communist South Vietnam, postponing elections if necessary. The French would feel, however, that such a course would involve a substantially increased risk of renewed hostilities with the Viet Minh. . . ." (Ibid., p. 8)

"We believe that the French estimate that South Vietnam cannot be held over the long term, except at very high cost." (Ibid., p. 8)

The French were unlikely to provide Diem with the "full and positive support" -- despite a French-U.S. understanding of September 29, in which the French agreed "to support Diem in the establishment of a strong, anti-Communist regime in Vietnam" (ibid., p. 7). "Diem will probably not be able to reestablish the authority of the government throughout South Vietnam and to tackle effectively the multitude of pressing problems now facing the country." (Ibid., p. 8) Thus, the Estimate ended on a gloomy note: "We believe, on the basis of present trends, it is highly unlikely that South Vietnam will develop the strength necessary to counter growing Communist subversion within its border; it almost certainly would not be able to defeat the Communists in countrywide elections. Even before the elections scheduled for 1956, the probable growth of Communist influence in the South may result in strong pressures within South Vietnam for coalition with the North." (Ibid., p. 9)

Subsequently, reassured by Diem's successes in subduing a variety of non-communist challenges to his leadership, the U.S. moved into the key role in support of Diem it had earlier hoped the French might undertake. Yet the question posed by the French appreciation of the situation remained hanging: Was it possible to hold South Vietnam "over the long term" without a "very high cost"?

### 3. Sect Warfare, 1955-1957

By the spring of 1955, Diem was engaged in a sharp confrontation with the Binh Xuyen gangsters and with the religious sects of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, and the possibility was recognized that he might (as in fact, he did) win victory and increase his prestige and authority. Nevertheless, an estimate of 26 April 1955 was still pessimistic about his longer-term prospects:

"Even if the present impasse were resolved, we believe that it would be extremely difficult, at best, for a Vietnamese government, regardless of its composition, to make progress toward developing a strong, stable anti-Communist government capable of resolving the basic social, economic, and political

problems of Vietnam, the special problems arising from the Geneva agreement, and capable of meeting the long-range challenge of the Communists. . . ." (NIE 63.1-2-55, 26 April 1955, p. 3)

Meanwhile, it continued to appear likely that open communist pressure would be postponed until mid-1956, but only until then. An estimate of probable developments in North Vietnam to July 1956 concluded:

" . . . The resumption of widespread guerrilla activities appears unlikely prior to the election deadline, unless the DRV should come to the conclusion that South Vietnam can be won only by force. Such a conclusion would become more likely should the Diem government persist in refusing to enter the election discussions, should election discussions not proceed favorably for the DRV, or should the Diem government succeed, with US assistance, in consolidating its strength to the point of becoming a nationalist alternative to the Ho regime. Moreover, if during the period of this estimate little progress is made towards relaxing tensions, Peiping and Moscow might permit the DRV greater freedom of action. Should the DRV decide to use force short of open invasion, it would probably attempt to undermine the Saigon government by initiating a campaign of sabotage and terror, seeking the formation of a new government more amenable to demands for a national coalition. These tactics are likely to include the activation of DRV guerrilla units now in South Vietnam and their reinforcement by the infiltration in small units of regulars from the North." (NIE 63.1-55, 19 July 1955, p. 2)

By the fall of 1955, although Diem and his army were still struggling with Hoa Hao and Cao Dai (having scattered the Binh Xuyen), it seemed likely that they would prevail, and emerge with unchallenged authority, at least for a time:

"Nevertheless, the success of Diem's efforts to establish a viable anti-Communist government in South Vietnam is still in doubt. Although Diem has established control over the apparatus of government, he has dealt only in part with such fundamental problems as: (a) the development of an effective administration, particularly on provincial and local levels; (b) the institution of a popularly-sanctioned constitutional basis for the regime; (c) the elimination of armed opposition and the extension of government authority throughout all areas of South Vietnam; (d) the suppression of Viet Minh military and political capabilities remaining in South Vietnam; and (e) the restoration of the economy." (NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955, p. 3)



In the fall of 1955, the time was approaching when Diem had to reckon with communist reaction to a denial of their hopes for peaceful political victory.

"Diem will almost certainly not agree to hold national elections for the unification of Vietnam by July 1956. Although Diem, under pressure from the Western Powers, might reluctantly agree to indirect consultations with the DRV concerning elections, he would insist on conditions which he felt certain the Communists would be unable to accept. Aware that such a position will probably cause the Viet Minh to increase their efforts to destroy his government, Diem will probably seek to bind the US more specifically to the defense of Vietnam."

"The Viet Minh, despite their relative quiescence, present the greatest potential threat to Diem. Should the Viet Minh elect openly to invade the south with regular forces, they are capable of defeating the VNA and any French forces (if committed) now present in South Vietnam. Moreover, with an estimated 10,000 military personnel in South Vietnam, the Viet Minh have the capability to undertake local sabotage and terrorist actions; and small-scale but widespread guerrilla warfare. The Viet Minh can reinforce these forces by infiltrating into South Vietnam. The Viet Minh apparently exerts political influence in many areas scattered throughout South Vietnam." (NIE 63.1-3-55, 11 October 1955, p. 1)

"Should the Viet Minh initiate large-scale guerrilla operations supported by substantial infiltration from the north, the South Vietnamese government would be hard pressed to do more than maintain control in the Saigon-Cholon area and in a few other major urban centers. If the operation were prolonged, the government probably could not survive without military assistance from outside." (Ibid., p. 2)

Diem's greatest assets in this struggle were:

" . . . his reputation for honesty and unsullied nationalism, his control of the Vietnamese National Army, and the moral and financial support of the U.S. In addition, Diem has gained considerable popular following, especially in urban centers and in recently pacified areas and has the loyalty of the refugees from North Vietnam. However, should he lose army or US support, his regime would probably collapse." (Ibid., p. 3)

As early as the fall of 1955, limitations that later were to loom large on his ability to attract subordinate leadership were perceived:

" . . . His cabinet is composed primarily of loyal technicians who lack political stature. Most well known political figures of the pre-Diem period have been alienated by Diem's unwillingness to trust them and by his insistence that unquestioned acceptance of his leadership is the only basis for cooperation. Diem has depended heavily on his unpopular brothers for advice and entrusts them with positions of great responsibility. His tendency toward 'one man rule,' his dependence on his brothers for advice, and his rejection of Vietnamese leaders whom he does not trust, has denied his government many of the few trained administrators." (Ibid., pp. 3-4)

As for the public, when he took office in July 1954, the most significant political convictions of most South Vietnamese were "antipathy for the French combined with a personal regard for Ho Chi Minh as the symbol of Vietnamese Nationalism. . . ." (Ibid., p. 2)

Diem's efforts to "galvanize mass popular support" concentrated initially on "exploiting popular antipathy for Bao Dai and the French" and subsequently on developing "strong anti-Communist sentiment." (Ibid., p. 4) Nevertheless, confronting a communist regime in North Vietnam "possessing a far stronger Army, a more experienced administration, greater cohesion of leadership and greater drive than the government of South Vietnam," and led by Ho Chi Minh, "Premier Diem will almost certainly not agree to a test of relative popular strength in national elections." (Ibid., p. 5)

Although no estimates in the 1955-1956 period assumed the communists would open guerrilla operations immediately upon the final frustration of their election hopes in July 1956, the estimates recognized increasing pressures upon the communists for recourse to violent methods of achieving their long-run objectives. The 19 October 1955 NIE held that:

" . . . They probably estimate that unless they effectively challenge the position of the Diem government the latter will gradually strengthen and stabilize its position. Moreover, they have probably concluded that Diem will not agree to elections or unification schemes which would favor the Communists. Under these circumstances the chances for a Communist take-over of the south by means short of open force might decline. On the other hand, the Communists also probably realize that the use of force against South Vietnam --



either through open invasion or by infiltrating sufficient troops across the 17th Parallel to insure a successful 'liberation' -- would jeopardize current Bloc peace policies and risk provoking US intervention. In addition, the Communists may not presently have sufficient strength in South Vietnam quickly to overthrow the Diem government and may therefore estimate that to undertake widespread guerrilla warfare without substantial infiltration from the north might lead not only to the weakening of their exposed organization in the south but also to a drastic loss of public support." (Ibid., p. 6)

However, a July 1956 NIE noted that if substantial infiltration from the DRV were deemed necessary, it possessed the resources:

" . . . Ninety-five thousand men were evacuated from the south in the first few months following the Armistice. The DRV probably views this group as a possible instrument for subversive activity in South Vietnam and some may have been retrained, reindoctrinated, and perhaps even reinfilitrated." (NIE 63-56, 17 July 1956, p. 6)

By March 1956, Diem had reduced the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao groups to political impotence, and had won a substantial majority in South Vietnam's first national elections: "no openly anti-Diem Deputy was elected . . . due in part to government manipulation of the election campaign, and in part to a boycott of the elections by most of the opposition parties." (Ibid., p. 7)

The same NIE stated that it was likely that "organized non-communist resistance" would virtually disappear by 1957 and, indeed, that South Vietnam's military and security forces could maintain "the government in power against any potential armed opposition now located south of the 17th parallel," even against communist armed strength in the south estimated at "8,000 - 10,000, with approximately 5,000 organized in skeletal company and battalion sized units which could be expanded through recruitment." (Ibid., 10-11) However, longer-run prospects of the regime still depended on the decision of the North Vietnamese regime whether, and when, to activate their apparatus in the south and infiltrate "regroupees" from the north.

" . . . In the event of large scale, concerted guerrilla warfare supported by infiltration of men and supplies from the north, relatively large areas of rural Vietnam probably would be lost to government control. . . ." (Ibid., p. 10)

" . . . if the Communists decide to exercise their capability for armed intimidation and terror they could quickly reassert political control or influence, at least in some rural areas where GVN authority is tenuous.

"During the past year the Communists in South Vietnam have remained generally quiescent. They have passed by a number of opportunities to embarrass the Diem regime. Although some cadres and supplies are being infiltrated across the 17th parallel, the DRV probably has not sent any large scale reinforcement or supply to the south. Communist activity in the south appears to concentrate on protecting vital bases and supply caches, developing clandestine paramilitary organizations, and implementing a broad program of infiltration and subversion. While seeking to maintain intact as much of their armed strength as possible, their main activity seems to be an effort to weaken the Diem government by subversive and political tactics. Communist directives indicate that penetration and subversion of the GVN military and security forces is a major objective. . . . " (Ibid., p. 11)

But the communists' choices were narrowing all the time:

"The DRV probably estimates that its chances for securing control of South Vietnam by means short of open attack or large scale guerrilla action supported from the north will gradually diminish with the passage of time. . . . The DRV probably also believes that its covert assets in South Vietnam will gradually decline if the Diem government is permitted to concentrate on internal security and economic problems free of external harassment." (Ibid., pp. 12-13)

Thus,

"The only remaining course of action holding out some promise for the early achievement of Communist control in South Vietnam appears to be the development of large scale guerrilla warfare in the south. In recent weeks a number of reports from sources of untested reliability have indicated that the Communists may have started preparations in both South Vietnam and in the north to begin guerrilla action. DRV allegations of Vietnamese violations of the demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel and Communist claims of US-Diem plans to violate the Armistice could be propaganda cover for the initiation of guerrilla action against the south." (Ibid., p. 13)



However, the July 1956 NIE took the position that the DRV was unlikely to use its capabilities for instituting such large-scale guerrilla action within South Vietnam during the next year or so. Yet, Diem's unforeseen success in dealing with non-communist challenges led to increasing hope that he would be able to survive even a later confrontation with the communists.

" . . . Diem's success in by-passing the July 1956 election date without evoking large scale Communist military reaction will reassure many Vietnamese and encourage them to cooperate with GVN programs to expose and root out Communists. Continued improvement in internal security will depend in some measure on the government's ability to deal with economic and social problems and on the effectiveness of the administrative apparatus.

"If the Communists were to undertake large scale guerrilla action in South Vietnam, they probably would not be able to develop widespread popular support, especially if the VNA were to register some early military success. The GVN is being increasingly accepted as a nationalist alternative to Communist leadership. Public confidence in the GVN, combined with general war-weariness, may have already reached the point where any effort to upset the government by force would lead to a strong popular reaction against the guerrillas. (Ibid., p. 14)

This NIE came close to being a high-water mark in optimism concerning Diem's ability to meet his dual challenges, both short and long run. But political trends that could restore the vigor of his non-communist opposition were seen:

"....The trend toward authoritarian rule through the political parties led by Diem's relatives and small circle of trusted associates will probably continue. Isolation and neutralization of government critics and men disliked or distrusted by Diem will also continue. Diem and his associates are likely to exert strong pressures against any opposition in the Assembly. Thus it is not likely that Diem or his government will meet any serious opposition in the National Assembly during the period of this estimate [through mid-1957]; however, over a longer period the accumulation of grievances among various groups and individuals may lead to development of a national opposition movement...." (Ibid., p. 14)

In January, 1957, MAAG Vietnam's semi-annual report to the Secretary of Defense (Country Statement on MDAP, Non-NATO Countries, date cited) noted hopefully that:

"The internal security situation in Vietnam has improved during the last year in regards to the dissident sects. Viet Minh armed cadres total approximately 1,370 effectives, Hoa Hao

dissidents total approximately 850. No effective resistance is anticipated from the few remaining Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen. Activity of Viet Minh cadres in Free Vietnam has accelerated. While primarily political in nature, it does pose a threat to internal security. These cadres are attempting to infiltrate and take over the dissident sects. Reports indicate that they have succeeded in these efforts with a fraction of the Hoa Hao. On the other hand, approximately 7,000 sect troops have indicated their loyalty by joining forces with the government and have recently been integrated as a part of the National Army."

"....It appears that the Communist efforts are mainly in a passive stage of long-range subversion of the 'will to fight.' The Vietnamese Psychological Action Section is increasing its efforts to counter 'Red propaganda'. Improvement of social status, security, and living standards are essential elements in preventing susceptibility to Communist subversion which may detract from the effectiveness of military forces."

"The Vietnamese Army is considered capable of establishing and maintaining internal security throughout the populous areas of Free Vietnam against dissident sects and other anti-government elements...."

"The Binh Xuyen have been destroyed as an effective anti-government military force and a major portion of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao forces have been integrated into the National Army."

"Intelligence reports indicate that despite heavy losses due to military operations and desertions, the Viet Minh organization in Free Vietnam remains a serious problem. Recent mergers of other dissident and rebel elements with the Viet Minh, have considerably strengthened the Viet Minh cause."

"The Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps (in villages throughout Free Vietnam) are of material assistance in supplementing the efforts of the Vietnamese Army in the accomplishment of the internal security mission. As these para-military units become better equipped and trained, their increased capability for assuming the major role in maintaining internal security will afford necessary relief of Army units for training. Simultaneously, this will add to Free Vietnam's potential for providing resistance to external aggression."

An NIE of May 1957 on "The Prospects for North Vietnam" (NIE 63.2-57), considered that the communist leaders in North Vietnam, despite "sporadic outbursts of violence," remained "in firm control largely because of the loyalty and effectiveness of the army." However, they were considered crucially dependent on the USSR and CPR, and were



deemed unlikely to launch an attack on the South unless there were unforeseen serious disturbances there:

"Not only are the DRV leaders bound to the Bloc by strong ideological ties, but the very existence of the Communist regime in North Vietnam is dependent on continued Bloc diplomatic, military, and economic support. The Chinese Communists seem to exercise somewhat greater influence than the USSR and have given the DRV greater economic and diplomatic support....However, there is no evidence that Soviet and Chinese Communists are at odds over North Vietnam."

"The Bloc has recently given less than full support to Vietnamese reunification, to the perceptible discomfort of the DRV. At the May 1956 meeting of the Geneva co-chairmen, the Soviet Union tacitly accepted the status quo in Vietnam for an indefinite period. In January 1957 the USSR further recognized the long term nature of the division of Vietnam when it proposed, as a countermove to Western proposals for the admission of South Vietnam and South Korea, that both North and South Vietnam and North and South Korea should be admitted to the United Nations. Nevertheless, the DRV will almost certainly continue to be guided in its external course of action by the general policy set down by Moscow and Peiping, although it will continue to advocate a stronger policy on reunification."

"The DRV continues to maintain its apparatus for subversion within South Vietnam and has the capability to infiltrate fairly large numbers of military and political personnel into South Vietnam. Although the Communists in the South have been largely quiescent, some trained military personnel remain, loosely organized in small units that presumably could be reactivated for missions of assassination, sabotage, or limited guerrilla activity. South Vietnamese security forces intermittently discover cached Communist arms."

"Because the country-wide elections envisaged by the Geneva Agreements have not been held and because military action has been prevented, the DRV has been frustrated in its hopes of gaining control of South Vietnam. This has caused some discontent among cadres evacuated from the South in the expectation that they would soon return. Unification of the country remains a principal objective of the DRV regime, and it continues to seek support for its pretensions to emerge as the government of the whole of Vietnam. Its 'liberalization' measures are designed to appeal to the population of the South as well as the North. The DRV has maintained its pose of adherence to the terms of the ceasefire agreement concluded at Geneva while accusing the Republic of

Vietnam and the US of violations. It is seeking to enhance its international prestige and position, and to secure the broadest possible support for the political settlement envisaged at the Geneva Conference which it still insists must eventually be implemented."

"The DRV will probably continue for the next year or two to restrict its campaign for reunification to 'peaceful' means. However, the DRV will continue its efforts to infiltrate and to subvert official and nonofficial organizations and to exploit dissident and dissatisfied groups in South Vietnam. It would probably not use its paramilitary forces in South Vietnam to initiate widespread guerrilla activity unless it estimated that the situation in South Vietnam had so deteriorated that such action could overthrow the government. The DRV will continue to have the capability to overrun South Vietnam in a relatively short time if opposed only by South Vietnamese forces, but it would only launch such an attack if the DRV together with Moscow and Peiping were to estimate that such action carried little risk of military intervention by the US."

By mid-1957, the security outlook in South Vietnam, according to MAAG's intelligence, was rosy indeed; the only dark clouds hovered over the Viet Cong (MAAG, "Country Statement..., 15 July 1957):

"In the past six months Dissident Sect strengths have fallen off. Numerically the Hoa Hao Sect has remained about the same (estimated at 850-950 armed men) but its power has been greatly diminished due to continuous government military operations, the improvement of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, the capture of bases and equipment by government forces, and the resulting loss in morale. Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen military forces are negligible....

"The Viet Cong guerrillas and propagandists, however, are still waging a grim battle for survival. In addition to an accelerated propaganda campaign, the Communists have been forming 'front' organizations to influence at least portions of all anti-government minorities. Some of these organizations are militant, some political. An example of the former is the 'Vietnamese Peoples' Liberation Movement Forces,' a military unit composed of ex-Cao Dai, ex-Hoa Hao, ex-Binh Xuyen, escaped political prisoners, and Viet Cong cadres. An example of the latter is the 'Vietnam-Cambodian Buddhist Association', one of several organizations seeking to spread the theory of 'Peace and Co-existence.' The armed strength of Viet Cong-controlled units in Free Vietnam is now estimated at approximately 1,500."



#### 4. Rise of the Viet Cong, 1957-1960

The Department of State sponsored an intelligence estimate for the U.S. SEATO Council Representatives, dated 3 April 1958, entitled "Nature and Extent of the Communist Subversive Threat to the Protocol States of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos." This estimate held that the DRV continued to pose a basic threat to the GVN:

"Although Communist tactics have shifted over the past few years, the real objective -- ultimate Communist control of all Vietnam -- has remained unchanged. Overt aggression, employed by the Communists prior to the Geneva Agreements and ceasefire, has been at least temporarily put aside in favor of demands for 'peaceful reunification,' more in accord with the general Soviet line of peaceful co-existence. The Communist peaceful pose, however, has not brought any relaxation in the build-up of DRV military strength or repressive Communist control over the population in North Vietnam. Moreover, support and assistance provided by the DRV for Communist subversive activities in South Vietnam (as well as in Laos and to a lesser extent Cambodia and Thailand) has not been reduced...."

"...The continuation of the Communist program to infiltrate and support subversive cadres in South Vietnam is the clearest indication of the unchanged nature of their objective in Vietnam and the threat which this constitutes for the GVN. The strongly anti-Communist policy of the GVN has forced the Communists to operate underground rather than through legal parties or front groups. Little concrete information is available concerning the organization and leadership of the Communist subversive apparatus in South Vietnam. At the time of the armistice, a considerable number of armed and trained Communist military personnel were left behind in South Vietnam, organized into a basic structure of a hierarchy of Administrative and Resistance Committees. Effective security measures carried out by the Diem government have reduced these armed Communist cadres to an estimated 1100-1400. The remaining cadres probably retain a roughly similar organizational pattern, although they have reduced their unit size and reportedly have changed their structure at the lowest level to make it more difficult for the GVN to penetrate the network.

"Alongside the guerrilla nucleus (and undoubtedly with some duplication of personnel), the Communists have maintained and sought to expand their political network in South Vietnam. The latter organization probably encompasses a considerably larger number than the armed cadres, which, operating underground, are more difficult to identify or assess....

"Leadership and direction for Communist subversive activity in the GVN is provided from North Vietnam by the Communist Lao Dong Party. In the past, several South Vietnamese Communist leaders who went North at the time of the armistice have been identified as playing important roles in directing and coordinating Communist operations within the GVN. Most powerful of these is Le Duan, who has recently enjoyed a swift rise to top-ranking status in the DRV hierarchy...."

"...The Communists are now believed to be actively cultivating the remnants of the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen dissident bands, dispersed by GVN security forces in 1955. As many as 1,500 armed non-Communist dissidents are believed still in hiding in bands of various size in the delta region south of Saigon, the Plaine des Joncs, along the Cambodian border and northwest of Saigon. Through the years, the weapons of these outlaw bands have deteriorated, and ammunition has run low. The Communists are believed providing many of these bands with both assistance and guidance, in return for support or at least lip service to DRV aims. The DRV has also included a few minor sect leaders in its "Fatherland Front" in hopes of attracting support from sect adherents in the South. In its propaganda, the DRV claims to pursue a policy of religious tolerance and denounces the GVN for alleged religious persecution.

"A degree of success in the Communist efforts to subvert the sects and sect leaders was indicated by a recent raid on a French plantation about 50 miles north of Saigon. In addition to robbing and some wanton destruction, an estimated 3-700 bandits claiming to be 'religious men' harangued the workers concerning the benefits of life in the North and warned them not to cooperate with the 'American-controlled' Diem government. The Cao Dai Pope, living in exile in Phnom Penh, has published statements in line with Communist themes, and an organization combining various sect remnants has reportedly been formed with a Communist advisor."

The MAAG intelligence estimate included in its mid-1958 report ("Narrative Study," 24 August 1958) was, however, more directly focused on DRV conventional military strength, and displayed a somewhat different view of "Viet Cong" than had been evident in earlier MAAG reports:

#### "ENEMY THREAT & PROBABLE COURSE OF ACTION

##### "Viet Cong (North Vietnam Communists):

"(1) Strength: It is estimated that the Viet Cong in North Vietnam, currently have available approximately 268,000 regular army troops organized into 14 Infantry Divisions, 1 Artillery Division, 1 Anti-aircraft Artillery Groupment,



11 independent Infantry Regiments, 5 Security Regiments, plus combat support and service support units. In addition, there are para-military forces estimated to number up to approximately 235,000 personnel, which are organized as two separate forces, the Provincial Forces and the Armed Militia....

"(2) Capabilities:...Although it is highly probable that some advance indication or warning will be received, an attack on South Vietnam by Viet Cong forces could occur without warning at any time. With or without warning, it must be realized that the initiative, at least during the initial stages of a war, will rest with the Viet Cong. Accordingly, it must be assumed that the enemy will be able to provide for the necessary build-up of his forces, execute planned deployments and launch his attack at selected points at his own time and convenience....In conjunction with the conduct of operations by military forces, the Viet Cong will employ to the maximum guerrilla forces and subversive/dissident elements already in place in South Vietnam. The strength of these elements is currently estimated at approximately 2000 personnel, a majority of whom are armed. It can be expected that the Viet Cong will make every effort to reinforce these elements prior to and during the initiation of hostilities in order to enhance their capability for the conduct of guerrilla warfare, create internal disorder, and execute sabotage and conduct attacks on pre-selected critical targets within South Vietnam for the primary purpose of impeding or interfering with operations being undertaken by South Vietnam armed forces....

"(3) Possible Courses of Action:

"(a) Continuation of Viet Cong attempts to gain control of South Vietnam through a combination of diplomatic, economic, political and subversive means.

"(b) Overt use of military force against neighboring states is most likely to be undertaken unilaterally by the Viet Cong, but would be most likely a part of an all-out Communist effort to take all of Southeast Asia."

Washington estimates were, however, beginning to reflect concern over Diem's political solvency. For example, an Operations Coordinating Board Progress Report on U.S. policy in mainland Southeast Asia, dated May 28, 1958, drew attention both to an increase in communist subversive and terrorist pressures against the Diem regime, and to aspects in Diem's political style that could limit the ability of his regime to cope with those pressures:

"Political and Security Problems of the Diem Government.

President Ngo Dinh Diem's policy of strict control in the political and economic fields has caused a certain amount of internal dissatisfaction. Should the President's exercise of personal authority develop too far there may be danger that the resultant frustration of government officials might preclude the united support for his regime which the situation requires. Otherwise, the President's stern police measures and his emphasis on internal security have led to some criticism of the government. This emphasis on internal security stems from the recent emergence of the country, the continuation of communist-inspired violence and subversion, and such phenomena as the assassination of local officials in rural areas of southern Viet-Nam."

Half a year later, on January 7, 1959, a similar OCB Progress Report asserted:

"Internal Security. It has become increasingly clear that the communists, no longer expectant that Free Viet-Nam will fall to their control through peaceful methods, are executing a carefully planned campaign of violence aimed at undermining the stability of the Diem Government. Their concentration of activities in rural areas where communications and terrain make it difficult for the government to cope with them recalls the tactics used against the French during the Indochina War. Assassinations, particularly of officials in rural areas, continue at an alarming rate of about fifteen to thirty-five a month. Attacks on rubber plantations and reported communist plans to break up the land development, land reform and agricultural credit programs indicate deliberate efforts to interfere with Viet-Nam's economic programs."

The first National Intelligence Estimate to assess the new situation--and the first NIE or SNIE on South Vietnam since 1956--was issued in May, 1959 (NIE 63-59, "Prospects for North and South Vietnam," 26 May 1959):

"The prospect of reunification of Communist North Vietnam (DRV) and western-oriented South Vietnam (GVN) remains remote. In the DRV the full range of Communist techniques is used to control the population, socialize the economy, impose austerity and direct investment to economic rehabilitation and development. The DRV maintains large armed forces. In South Vietnam, despite the authoritarian nature of the regime, there is far more freedom. Local resources and US aid are devoted to developing the armed forces, maintaining internal security, and supporting a relatively high standard of living, with lesser emphasis on economic development....

"In South Vietnam political stability depends heavily upon President Diem and his continued control of the instruments of



power, including the army and police. Diem will almost certainly be President for many years. The regime will continue to repress potential opposition elements and depend increasingly upon the effectiveness of the Can Lao, the regime's political apparatus, which is run by Diem's brothers Nhu and Can....

"The capabilities of the GVN armed forces will improve given continued US materiel support and training. Continuance of the present level of training is threatened by a recent finding of the International Control Commission (ICC) that the US Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) should end its activities by mid-1959. In any event, GVN forces will remain incapable of withstanding more than temporarily the larger DRV forces. The internal security forces will not be able to eradicate DRV supported guerrilla or subversive activity in the foreseeable future. Army units will probably have to be diverted to special internal security assignments....

"The GVN is preoccupied with the threat to national security and the maintenance of large military and security forces. It will probably remain unwilling to devote a significantly greater share of resources and attention to longer range economic development. Assuming continued US aid at about present levels, modest improvement in South Vietnam's economic position is likely. However, development will lag behind that in the North, and the GVN will continue to rely heavily upon US support to close the gap between its own resources and its requirements....

"There is little prospect of a significant improvement in relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia so long as the present leaders of the two countries remain in power. Relations with Laos will probably remain generally friendly. Continued suspicion that the French are intriguing in the area to recapture a position of major influence will probably prevent an improvement of Franco-GVN relations....

"Despite widespread popular discontent, the Government of the DRV is in full control of the country and no significant internal threat to the regime is likely. With large-scale Bloc aid, considerable progress has been made in rehabilitating and developing the economy with major emphasis on agriculture, raw materials and light industry. The regime will probably soon have laid the foundations for considerable economic expansion....

"The DRV has no diplomatic relations with any country outside the Bloc and its foreign policy is subservient to the Bloc. We believe that it will continue its harassment of the GVN and of Laos, though a military invasion of either is unlikely...."

"President Diem continues to be the undisputed ruler of South Vietnam; all important and many minor decisions are referred to him. Although he professes to believe in representative government and democracy, Diem is convinced that the Vietnamese are not ready for such a political system and that he must rule with a firm hand, at least so long as national security is threatened. He also believes that the country cannot afford a political opposition which could obstruct or dilute the government's efforts to establish a strong and secure state. Although respected for his courage, dedication, and integrity, Diem has remained a somewhat austere and remote figure to most Vietnamese and has not generated widespread popular enthusiasm.

"Diem's regime reflects his ideas. A facade of representative government is maintained, but the government is in fact essentially authoritarian. The legislative powers of the National Assembly are strictly circumscribed; the judiciary is undeveloped and subordinate to the executive; and the members of the executive branch are little more than the personal agents of Diem. No organized opposition, loyal or otherwise, is tolerated, and critics of the regime are often repressed. This highly centralized regime has provided resolute and stable direction to national affairs, but it has alienated many of the country's educated elite and has inhibited the growth of governmental and political institutions which could carry on in Diem's absence...."

"Although the popular enthusiasm attendant on the achieving of independence and the end of colonial rule has subsided and some disillusion has arisen, particularly among the educated elite, there appears to be little identifiable public unrest. There is some dissatisfaction among military officers largely because of increasing Can Lao meddling in military affairs. The growth of dissatisfaction is inhibited by South Vietnam's continuing high standard of living relative to that of its neighbors, the paternalistic attitude of Diem's government towards the people and the lack of any feasible alternative to the present regime.

"The Communist apparatus in South Vietnam is essentially an operating arm of the North Vietnamese Communist Party (Lao Dong), but there have been recent indications of Chinese Communist participation in its operations. It is estimated that there are about 2,000 active guerrillas. They are in small units scattered along the Cambodian border, the south coast, and in the remote plateau region of the north. There are probably several thousand others, now inactive, who have access



to arms and would participate in guerrilla activities if so ordered. The guerrillas are able to marshall a force of several hundred men for major hit-and-run raids, as they demonstrated twice during 1958. They have recently stepped up their intimidation campaign, assassinating local officials in remote areas, terrorizing local populations and disrupting government operations. The dissident armed remnants of the religious sects are largely broken up. About 2,000 such dissidents surrendered to the government during 1958 and the few hundred remaining in the jungle are probably now absorbed or dominated by the Communists.

"The government has been able to restrict but not eliminate the subversive and espionage activities of clandestine Communist agents. It is probable that Communists have penetrated some local army and security units, village councils, and local branches of the government. There is no evidence, however, that such penetration is sufficient to hamper government operations seriously or that it extends to the higher echelons of the government. There is probably a widespread Communist underground in the urban areas, especially Saigon, and Communist intelligence of GVN plans and activities is probably good. Communist agents are also stimulating unrest among the tribal minorities in the central highlands, a relatively inaccessible and sparsely populated area which the government is attempting to settle and develop, primarily for security reasons.

"South Vietnam's 136,000-man army, supported by the Civil Guard, the Self-Defense Corps and the police services, is capable of maintaining effective internal security except in the most remote jungle and mountain areas. Until mid-1957, the army had the primary responsibility for internal security, and had considerable success. By that time major responsibility for internal security had been given to the provincial Civil Guard (48,000) and the village Self-Defense Corps (47,000). These organizations have proven to be inadequately trained and equipped for the job, and units from the armed forces have continued to be called in to meet special situations. The size and scattered distribution of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps add to the problems of training and equipping them and of coordinating their activities. In some regions, they are infiltrated by Communists. The police services, which include the 7,500-man Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation and 10,500-man police force stationed in the main cities, have had considerable success in tracking down subversives and terrorists and are developing into efficient organizations.

"South Vietnam has made only limited progress toward basic long-term economic development in the five years since independence...."

"The prospects for continued political stability in South Vietnam depend heavily upon President Diem and his ability to maintain firm control of the army and police. The regime's efforts to assure internal security and its belief that an authoritarian government is necessary to handle the country's problems will result in a continued repression of potential opposition elements. This policy of repression will inhibit the growth of popularity of the regime, and we believe that dissatisfaction will grow, particularly among those who are politically conscious...."

It was not until 1960 that U.S. intelligence estimates began to reflect conviction that Diem's political base had in fact been seriously eroded, and that the DRV-supported Viet Cong posed a vital threat. The intelligence of 1960 is treated in detail in Section C, below; suffice to say for the purposes of this summary, mounting rural violence validated the estimate of the 1959 NIE that a concerted and dangerous Viet Cong attack on the GVN was underway.

GVN Internal Security Indicators  
in NIE & SNIE, 1958-1961

	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>
Assassinations of GVN -			
Officials & Backers	193	239	1400
Kidnappings	236	344	700

But the most remarkable index of the Viet Cong upsurge was their reported zooming strength:



# VIET CONG STRENGTH#

1954 - 1964

(Rounded to nearest thousand)

Year	Main and Local Force (Regulars)	Guerrillas, Self-Defense Units, Secret Self-Defense Units (Irregulars)	Source
1955*	10,000	NA	NSC Briefing, 16 March 1956. Open sources give 5-10,000. <u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 18 May 1956, suggests 10,000 number should be revised to 6-8000.
1956*	5,000-7,500	NA	<u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 10 August 1956.
1957*	1,000-2,000	2,000	<u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 30 May 1958; <u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 18 July 1958.
1958*	April-2,000	NA	<u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 19 December 1958.
1959*	2,000	NA	NIE 63-59, 26 May 1959.
1960*	April-4,000 Sept.-7,000 Dec.-10,000	3,000 (SNIE 63.1-60)	<u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 17 February 1961. SNIE 63.1-60, 3-5,000 regulars.
1961*	June - 15,000 Sept. - 16,000 - 17,000	NA	<u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 13 October 1961; <u>Weekly Intelligence Digest</u> , 20 October 1961.
1962*	23,000	NA	<u>Current Intelligence Weekly Summary</u> , OCI 2 November 1962.
1963**	June - 25,000	NA	<u>Southeast Asia Military Fact Book</u> , DIA/JCS.
1964**	June - 25,000 Dec - 25,000	72,000	Based on MACV data. Data not retroactively adjusted.

\*Estimate of Viet Cong strength for this period is subject to great uncertainty. The numbers here should be treated as order of magnitude.

\*\*Add approximately 40,000 in the Viet Cong "infrastructure". The infrastructure is defined as the PRP, PRP Central Committee, and the NLF. See MACV, Monthly Order of Battle Summaries, for a discussion. Also add 23-25,000 in Administrative Service, i.e., staff and technical service units subordinate to various headquarters.

#From letter, Rand Corporation, L-1498Z (attachment 1, 8-11-67). Data in table are SECRET.

The statistical picture presented above of an insurgent force declining in numbers from 1954 through 1959, and then mushrooming rapidly in 1960 and thereafter, is obviously misleading. What U.S. intelligence focused on in the immediate aftermath of Geneva were the remnants of the Viet Minh military force following the regroupment. These, whatever their strength, probably represented only a fraction of the numbers of former Viet Minh in active opposition to the GVN after 1956, and apparently did not reflect the total numbers of armed dissidents from 1957 onward, nor the locally recruited political and logistic apparatus which supported the Viet Cong "armed propaganda teams," or guerrilla bands. The phenomenal growth of the Viet Cong, given the low estimates on infiltration from North Vietnam (some 5,000 through 1960), means either that the DRV cadres were extraordinarily effective in organizing and motivating rural people among whom U.S. intelligence detected little unrest through mid-1960, or that U.S. estimates were low. The latter seems probable.

Much of what the United States knows now about the origins of the insurgency in South Vietnam rests on information it has acquired since 1963, approximately the span of time that an extensive and effective American intelligence apparatus had been functioning in Vietnam. Before then, our intelligence was drawn from a considerably more narrow and less reliable range of sources, chiefly Vietnamese, and could not have supported analysis in depth of insurgent organization and intentions. It is surprising, therefore, that from 1954 to 1960 U.S. intelligence estimates at the national level correctly and consistently estimated that the threat to GVN internal security was greater than the danger from overt invasion. They pegged the Viet Cong general offensive as beginning in late 1959, with some preparations noted as early as 1957. In general, they were critical of Diem, consistently expressing skepticism that he could thread his way through recognized internal political difficulty. To be sure, the same estimates misjudged the numerical and political strength of the Viet Cong, the extent of popular disaffection, and miscalculated the ability of the GVN to cope with the Viet Cong. But as strategic intelligence, U.S. estimates were remarkably sound.

#### B. U.S. Policy and Programs, 1954-1960

U.S. national policy statements of the period, in the records of the National Security Council, did not exactly reflect U.S. intelligence in treating insurgency as the GVN's primary threat. U.S. "counterinsurgency" policy--though not so termed until 1960--proceeded from the premise that U.S. national interests required the U.S. to provide political support, economic aid, and military assistance to the GVN to preclude its domination by communists. The policy governing in the immediate aftermath of Geneva was laid out in NSC 5405 and 5429/5 of 1954. On July 11, 1956, the Operations Coordinating Board published a "Progress Report" on the programs directed by these two policy papers, noting among "major problems or areas of difficulty" that:



"The Diem Government's resistance to communist demands for all-Vietnam elections, under the Geneva Accords, and its success in achieving internal security increase the likelihood of enlarged communist subversive efforts. This underlines the necessity of assisting the Diem Government to develop further counter-measures with considerable emphasis on police and para-military forces and civic action....The Vietnamese are increasingly critical of the general orientation and specific procedures of our aid program. Their request for an increased emphasis on capital development with consequent diminution of the flow of consumer goods entering the country will require careful review....

a. NSC 5612/1

During the summer of 1956 the NSC Planning Board conducted a review of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, and on September 5, 1956, the NSC adopted a new "Statement of Policy" (NSC 5612/1) which after stipulating that "the loss to Communist control of any single free country would encourage tendencies toward accommodation by the rest...", noted that:

"Although Communist policy now emphasizes non-military methods, the danger of overt aggression will remain inherent so long as Communist China and North Viet Nam continue a basically hostile policy supported by substantial military forces. There is only a cease-fire in Viet Nam and sporadic hostilities continue in Laos....At present overt aggression and, except in the cases of Viet Nam and Laos, militant subversion are less likely than an intensified campaign of Communist political, economic and cultural penetration in the area."

NSC 5612/1 laid out the following objectives for Vietnam:

"Assist Free Vietnam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government to enable Free Viet Nam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone."

"Work toward the weakening of the Communists in North and South Viet Nam in order to bring about the eventual peaceful reunification of a free and independent Viet Nam under anti-Communist leadership."

"Support the position of the Government of Free Viet Nam that all-Viet Nam elections may take place only after it is satisfied that genuinely free elections can be held throughout both zones of Viet Nam."

"Assist Free Viet Nam to build up indigenous armed forces, including independent logistical and administrative services, which will be capable of assuring internal security and of providing limited initial resistance to attack by the Viet Minh."

"Encourage Vietnamese military planning for defense against external aggression along lines consistent with U.S. planning concepts based upon approved U.S. policy, and discreetly manifest in other ways U.S. interest in assisting Free Viet Nam, in accordance with the SEATO Treaty, to defend itself against external aggression."

SUPPLEMENTARY STATEMENT OF POLICY  
on  
THE SPECIAL SITUATION IN NORTH VIET NAM

"Treat the Viet Minh as not constituting a legitimate government, and discourage other non-Communist states from developing or maintaining relations with the Viet Minh regime."

"Prevent the Viet Minh from expanding their political influence and territorial control in Free Viet Nam and Southeast Asia."

"Deter the Viet Minh from attacking or subverting Free Viet Nam or Laos."

"Probe weaknesses of the Viet Minh and exploit them internally and internationally whenever possible."

"Exploit nationalist sentiment within North Viet Nam as a means of weakening and disrupting Sino-Soviet domination."

"Assist the Government of Viet Nam to undertake programs of political, economic and psychological warfare against Viet Minh Communists."

"Apply, as necessary to achieve U.S. objectives, restrictions on U.S. exports and shipping and on foreign assets similar to those already in effect for Communist China and North Korea."

b. NSC 5809

In 1958, NSC 5612 was reviewed, and the portions on Vietnam reapproved without significant change. Proposed revisions, underlined below, indicated increased awareness of the GVN's deteriorating internal security:

"Assist Free Viet Nam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government to enable Free Viet Nam to assert an increasingly attractive contrast to conditions in the present Communist zone. In this regard encourage and assist



public relations and public information programs of the government of Viet Nam directed both internally to the free Vietnamese and externally to north Viet Nam...."\*

"Assist Free Viet Nam to build up indigenous armed forces, including independent logistical and administrative services, which will be capable of assuring internal security and of providing limited initial resistance to attack by the Viet Minh." \*\*

Otherwise, however, the new policy paper (NSC 5809 of April 2, 1958) was identical to its 1956 predecessor.

In late May of 1958 the Operations Coordinating Board submitted a progress report on U.S. programs in Vietnam which held that "in general we are achieving U.S. objectives in Viet-Nam." Among major operating problems facing the U.S., the report cited Vietnam's continued dependence on foreign aid: "In spite of some evidence of greater economic stability, Viet-Nam continues to depend on foreign aid, the largest part of which goes to support the military establishment. U.S. aid still accounts for approximately 85 percent of imports in two-thirds of the budgetary revenues." Also cited were the "political and security problems of the Viet-Nam Government":

"President Ngo Dinh Diem's policy of strict control in the political and economic fields has caused a certain amount of internal dissatisfaction. Should the President's exercise of personal authority develop too far there may be danger that the resultant frustration of government officials might weaken the united support for his regime which the situation requires. Otherwise, the President's stern police measures and his emphasis on internal security have led to some criticism of the government. This emphasis on internal security stems from the recent emergence of the country, continuation of communist-inspired violence and subversion, and such incidents as the assassination of local officials in rural areas of southern Vietnam...."

The OCB report took up the note that the U.S. should "encourage and assist elements of the Army of Vietnam to establish and utilize specific anti-subversive guerrilla formations and operations," but stated that anti-guerrilla operations interfered with the efficient training of the army:

\* Proposed by CIA and evidently adopted, although this is not altogether clear in DOD files. A further CIA revision, not adopted, would have added: "In this effort priority should be given to areas of greatest dissidence, particularly in the extreme south."

\*\* A CIA proposed amendment, evidently not approved, would have added: "Also encourage and assist elements of the Army of Viet Nam to establish and utilize specific anti-subversive guerrilla formations and operations. In the anti-guerrilla campaign encourage the government of Viet Nam to use the Vietnamese Army in a way which will help win the favor of the local populace in order to obtain its support for their campaigns, particularly for intelligence purposes."

"Viet-Nam. While continuing reorganization and training along U.S. lines the Vietnamese Armed Forces...are still conducting operations against fragments of dissident sects and Viet Cong guerrillas. These military operations have succeeded in practically eliminating the Binh Xuyen and Cao Dai forces. The Hoa Hao, operating along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border, even though small, still give the Vietnamese some embarrassment and required the employment of a small portion of the Vietnamese Army against their operations. The over-all success against these anti-government forces has facilitated the release of the majority of the Vietnamese units from pacification missions, thus increasing emphasis on unit training and the concomitant increased effectiveness of the armed forces. In addition, the activation of two corps headquarters within the army was completed last month and has resulted in a more satisfactory command structure which will materially increase the combat efficiency of the army.

In 1959 U.S. policy papers began to emphasize that GVN pre-occupation with internal security interfered with its ability to prosecute other desired programs, and particularly that economic development lagged what was "politically necessary" to "compete" with the DRV. The following is from the OCB Progress Report of January 7, 1959:

"A. SUMMARY EVALUATION

"32. Developments related particularly to a U.S. course of action to assist Free Viet-Nam to develop a strong, stable and constitutional government which would work toward the weakening of the communists in both North and South Viet-Nam. President Diem remained firmly in control despite some political dissatisfaction with his government....The communists and dissidents continued their campaign of assassinations, especially of officials in rural areas and carried out attacks aimed at disrupting Viet-Nam's economic progress. Although the government gave increasing attention to development of the economy, such development continued to be inhibited by almost pre-emptive military requirements which utilized a substantial portion of Viet-Nam's total resources, including U.S. aid....

"B. MAJOR OPERATING PROBLEMS FACING THE UNITED STATES

"33. Diem's Internal Political Position. Diem increased his travels throughout the country for the purpose of popularizing his regime. Increasing accomplishments of the government in the economic and social fields should also have beneficial political results. Nevertheless, the failure of the government to fully rally certain elements of the middle class, the intellectuals and former officials to its support, the frustration and restlessness of some of the present officials, and some



discontent in the army are sources of political weakness. This dissatisfaction is caused primarily by the authoritarian and pervasive political controls of the Ngo family and its associates.

Status of U.S. Actions: The desirability of liberalizing political and administrative controls is brought to the attention of the Vietnamese Government, when considered appropriately by the U.S. Ambassador. Possible lines of U.S. action are greatly limited due to the extreme sensitivity of Vietnamese leaders on this subject.

"34. Internal Security. It has become increasingly clear that the communists, no longer expectant that Free Viet-Nam will fall to their control through peaceful methods, are executing a carefully planned campaign of violence aimed at undermining the stability of the Diem Government. Their concentration of activities in rural areas where communications and terrain make it difficult for the government to cope with them recalls the tactics used against the French during the Indochina War. Assassinations, particularly of officials in rural areas, continue at an alarming rate of about fifteen to thirty-five a month. Attacks on rubber plantations and reported communist plans to break up the land development, land reform and agricultural credit programs indicate deliberate efforts to interfere with Viet-Nam's economic programs."

The subsequent OCB Progress Report of August, 1959--by which time the insurgency was spreading rapidly--illustrates well the policy difficulties of the United States in responding to the situation within the constraints of the Geneva Settlement. The report noted that the GVN:

"....Has undertaken or planned such countermeasures as the use of armed force, special military courts for the prompt trial of terrorists, the removal of peasants from isolated spots to larger villages, and the publicizing of internal security incidents to counteract the 'peaceful' propaganda of the North Vietnamese communist regime. Vietnamese military forces have improved under the MAAG training program, but the continuance of training at present levels would be inhibited by any action of the International Control Commission arising from its opposition to the indefinite retention in Viet-Nam of certain United States military personnel originally sent out for equipment salvage work and now largely used to supplement MAAG personnel in training duties. This necessitates efforts to work out with the Canadian, British and Indian Governments an acceptable basis in consonance with the Geneva Accords for an increase in MAAG personnel adequate

to replace the special mission personnel referred to above. Implementation of the United States aid project for re-training and re-equipping the Civil Guard has begun with the signing of the ICA project agreement with the Vietnamese Government and the despatch of ICA personnel to administer this project in Saigon. In spite of substantial U.S. assistance, economic development though progressing, is below that which is politically desirable."

c. Public Statements

Despite the increasingly pessimistic intelligence, however, and despite the notations in NSC reports of formidable problems in Vietnam, the public statements of Administration spokesmen, through August 1959 presented a generally sanguine picture of U.S. programs there. For example, in November, 1957, Ambassador Durbrow and General Williams appeared before a subcommittee of the House Committee on Government Operations and reported that Diem's government "had made remarkable progress." However, they did report that "Communists and sect remnants have regrouped and stepped up their terrorist activities in the past several months, and the Communists are infiltrating down the sparsely inhabited Mekong Valley and are becoming fairly active, particularly in the south. For this reason, [Diem] still has to use considerable number of his armed forces and a large number of his police force to carry on pacification work. Because of the terrorist activities in the fertile Delta area, the peasants, through fear or intimidation, cannot till their fields properly and thus produce more rice and other exports...." The Ambassador stressed that Diem was aware of the problem -- indeed, acutely aware -- but that he was impelled to defer all other considerations to the creation of an environment of security. The Ambassador quoted Diem as follows: "If we don't have assurances on the security front, what good will it do to build up the economy only to have it destroyed by Communist terrorists?" The Ambassador described Diem as "a devoted, honest, hard-working, Nationalist with a fine understanding of the internal political situation as well as the international political picture, particularly in Asia; but in consideration of his preoccupation of [security] he moves slowly in these fields...."\*

In March 1958 Admiral Felix B. Stump, USN, Commander in Chief, Pacific, appeared before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to testify for the Mutual Security Act of 1958. Admiral Stump invited one of his questioners on Vietnam to visit the country on the conviction that "he would be astonished at the improvement that has taken place. It has been beyond what would have been our wildest and most optimistic

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\* U.S. Congress, House, Foreign Aid Construction Projects, Committee on Government Operations, 85th Congress, Second Session, (Washington: GPO, 1958), 864-866.



dreams three years ago to see what has happened in South Vietnam." The Admiral also reported that while the Hoa Hao were still presenting difficulties in some areas, the Binh Xuyen and the Cao Dai were "pretty well eliminated." \*

But U.S. policy in Vietnam did not again achieve the status of a national issue until the summer of 1959, when a Scripps-Howard newspaperman published a series of articles alleging that the U.S. aid program in Vietnam was ill-directed, encumbered by waste and delay, and administered by bumbling, plush-living bureaucrats. Both the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs thereupon conducted hearings, and Ambassador Durbrow and General Williams were among the Administration officials called to testify.\*\* The picture presented in their testimony was so roseate that Senator Mansfield, for one, was inclined to look for an early termination of U.S. aid:

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. It would be correct to say, would it not, that a principal purpose of U.S. policy in Vietnam has been to prevent Communist aggression from the north?

"MR. DURBROW. That is one of our basic policies, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. And in a general way, another principal purpose has been to foster internal political and economic stability in South Vietnam, is that correct?

"MR. DURBROW. Correct.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Still another would be to maintain friendly ties with the Vietnamese?

"MR. DURBROW. Yes, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. You have instructed the various missions along these lines, have you not?

"MR. DURBROW. I have, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Have you ever instructed them to the effect that one of our purposes was to encourage the development of conditions of economic self-support in Vietnam which would enable us to reduce and eventually eliminate grants of aid?

"Before you answer that, I want to compliment General Williams for what he had to say relative to his contacts with

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\* U.S. Congress, Senate, Mutual Security Act of 1958, Committee on Foreign Relations, 85th Congress, Second Session (Washington: GPO, 1958), 120-121.

\*\* U.S. Congress, Senate, Situation in Vietnam, Committee on Foreign Relations, 86th Congress, First Session (Washington: GPO, 1959), 168-171, 198-199; House, Current Situation in the Far East, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 86th Congress, First Session (Washington: GPO, 1959), 34 ff., 45 ff.

the Vietnamese Government, because he has told them, if I remember his words correctly, that he was there to work himself out of a job.

"Mr. Ambassador?

"MR. DURBROW. That is one of the principal jobs we are doing there. We work on this at all times, working out the projects and plans for aid needed, discussing them with the Vietnamese officials and trying to do all we can to build up a sound basic economic structure so that they will become economically independent.

"I might add that this is the goal of all of these newly-developing countries and, particularly, Vietnam.

"The President has said to all of us many times:

"We are grateful for your aid, but we hope we can get on our feet as soon as possible," and that is one of the principal objectives we are trying to carry out.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. You are to be commended for it. That is a sound statement.

"So far as the aid programs are concerned, we have sought to achieve our various objectives, have we not, primarily through support of the Vietnamese armed forces and by assistance in the rehabilitation of the Vietnamese economy."

. . . . .

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Now, Mr. Durbrow, in the opening statements at this hearing we have had a picture drawn of some very significant changes in the situation in Vietnam since 1955.

"We know, for example, that in that year the survival of a free Vietnam and a free Vietnamese Government was still in grave doubt; was that a correct statement?

"MR. DURBROW. Quite correct.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. The stability of the government was threatened by the Binh Xuyen, by dissident political-religious sects such as the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai.

"There was a very substantial armed Communist Vietminh underground in the south; is that correct?



"MR. DURBROW. Not only in the south, sir; they were concentrated down there, but they were all over the country, the Communists, in particular.

"The sects were in the southwest basically, and in Saigon, but as far as the Binh Xuyen is concerned, they were primarily in the Saigon-Cholon area.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Yes.

"There was little real military strength to resist a Vietminh invasion from the north had it come about at that time?

"MR. DURBROW. Very little, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. South Vietnam was a war-prostrated area with very extensive devastation?

"MR. DURBROW. Quite correct. There is still evidence of that, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees from the north waiting to be resettled, the figure being somewhere between 600,000, the official figure, and 1 million?

"MR. DURBROW. Correct.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. These conditions have changed in significant degree in the past 4 years, have they not?

"MR. DURBROW. Very much so."

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. And there is a far greater degree of internal stability and security in Vietnam than there was in 1955?

"AMBASSADOR DURBROW. Very definitely.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. I should like to read into the record at this point a statement by Maj. Gen. Samuel L. Myers, former Deputy Chief of MAAG in Vietnam. General Myers stated on April 17 of this year, and I quote:

'The Binh Xuyen group was completely eliminated as a menace. The Cao Dai group was pacified or reoriented through political means to a point where it ceased to be any considerable obstacle. The Hoa Hao had been reduced to a handful of the diehards still holding out against the Government and still conducting extremely limited armed raids and assassinations. The Vietminh guerrillas, although constantly reinforced by men and weapons from outside South Vietnam, were gradually nibbled away until they ceased to be a major menace

to the Government. In fact, estimates at the time of my departure indicated that there was a very limited number of hostile individuals under arms in the country. Two territorial regiments, reinforced occasionally by one or two regular army regiments, were able to cope with their depredations.'

"That would indicate a far greater degree of internal stability in Vietnam than that which existed 4 years ago; would it not?

"MR. DURBROW. Yes, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. I read further from Major General Myers' statement. Speaking of the Vietnamese armed forces, he says, and I quote:

'They are now able to maintain internal security and have reached the point where that responsibility could be turned over to the civilian agencies. If there should be renewed aggression from the north on the part of the Vietminh, they can give a really good account of themselves. There are many Vietnamese who are even more optimistic than that statement implies and feel that they have the capability of counterattack.'

"That statement would indicate, would it not, considerable reduction of the danger of invasion from the north as it existed 4 years ago, or at least a far greater capacity to cope with it; would it not?

"MR. DURBROW. I would say the latter, sir.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. A far greater capacity to cope with it?

"MR. DURBROW. Because there are still Communists around, the danger is always there, ever present. But the possibility of countering it is much greater than it was before....

"SENATOR MANSFIELD: What is the nature and purpose of military aid in Vietnam at the present time?

"GENERAL WILLIAMS (Chief, MAAG, Vietnam). I would answer that in this way: The purpose of military aid in Vietnam is to enable the Vietnamese armed forces to provide for the internal security of their country and act as a deterrent against outside aggression.

"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Would that explanation hold for 1955 as well?

"GENERAL WILLIAMS. Yes, sir....



"SENATOR MANSFIELD. Assuming no drastic change in the general situation in Indochina, what do you see in the next 4 years as to the requirements of military aid in Vietnam? Are they likely to be substantially higher, are they likely to continue to be reduced in size or do you think they will remain just about the same? This calls for an estimate and an informed guess.

"GENERAL WILLIAMS. I would like to caution that what I say now will be a guess, based, however, on past experience and considered judgment.

"I would say that for 1960 the military budget should be practically the same as 1959. I should think beginning in 1961, I hope not later than 1961, it should start to decrease again."

#### 4. Program Data.

U.S. aid programs in Vietnam through the Eisenhower Administration are summarized below:

U.S. AID FOR SOUTH VIETNAM (Millions of Dollars by Fiscal Year) <sup>1/</sup>									
<u>FY Obligations</u>	<u>1946- 1954</u>	<u>2/ 1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1955- 1961</u>
Economic Grants	825.6	322.4	185.0	257.2	187.6	187.9	170.6	137.3	
Loans	---	---	25.0	25.0	1.5	19.5	11.4	13.2	
Sub-total	825.6	322.4	210.0	282.2	189.1	207.4	182.0	150.5	1543.6
Military Grants	709.6	---	167.3	110.5	53.2	41.9	70.9	65.0	508.8
Total <sup>3/</sup>	1535.2	322.4	377.3	392.7	242.3	249.3	252.9	215.5	2052.4
FY Economic Aid Expenditures	825.6	129.1	192.8	251.3	212.3	179.2	181.2	146.4	1292.3

1/ Source: Montgomery, op.cit., 284.

2/ Total aid program for the Associated States of Indo-China, including deobligations and adjustments, 1954-1961.

3/ Total grants and loans, 1946-1961: 3587.6

This program was among the largest in the world, reflecting a U. S. commitment sufficiently deep to assert a high priority for Vietnam among the numerous claimants for U.S. aid. From FY 1946 through FY 1961, Vietnam was the third ranking non-NATO recipient of aid, and the seventh worldwide; in FY 1961, the last Eisenhower program, South Vietnam was the fifth ranking recipient overall (behind India, Korea, Brazil, and Turkey):

U.S. Economic and Military Aid, FY 1946-1961  
(\\$ Millions)

<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Total</u>
France. . . . .	9,394
U.K. . . . .	8,689
Italy . . . . .	5,664
Germany . . . . .	4,999
Korea . . . . .	4,958
Vietnam -- China . . . . .	4,150 -- 3,588
Turkey . . . . .	3,484
Greece. . . . .	3,225
India . . . . .	3,115
Netherlands . . . . .	2,449

U.S. Economic and Military Aid, FY 1961

India . . . . .	669.8
Korea . . . . .	472.2
Brazil. . . . .	328.3
Turkey. . . . .	318.9
Vietnam . . . . .	215.5

Source: Agency for International Development,  
U.S. Foreign Assistance, June 1, 1945 - June  
30, 1961 (Revised March 21, 1962), 2-4.

In per-capita assistance, Vietnam also ranked high in comparison with its Asian neighbors.

U.S. Aid, 1960

<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Aid per Inhabitant</u>
Laos	\$17.00
Vietnam	13.70
China	12.50
Korea	8.60
India	1.90
Thailand	1.20

Source: Scigliano, op.cit., 112.

A recent study\* of U.S. assistance establishes that of all U.S. economic aid programs for less developed countries, 1945 to 1965, Vietnam has been the fifth ranking recipient and the sixth ranking per capita. In the decade 1956 to 1965, Vietnam was the fourth ranking recipient and the fourth per capita.

\*Kenneth M. Kauffman and Helena Stalson, "U.S. Assistance to Less Developed Countries, 1956-65," Foreign Affairs, Volume 45, No. 4, July 1967, 715 ff.



The relative importance of Vietnam in the U.S. world-view is further attested to by the fact that MAAG Vietnam, though limited in size out of regard for the Geneva Accords 1955-1960, was the only military aid mission commanded by a Lieutenant General. MAAG strength was held at 342 (plus 350 personnel in TERM),\* but the U.S. economic aid mission grew rapidly over the years, becoming by mid-1958, the largest in the world:

FOUR LARGEST U.S. ECONOMIC AID MISSIONS  
(As of 31 May 1958)

	<u>ICA Employees</u>	<u>Contract Employees</u>	<u>Total</u>
Vietnam	183	372	555
Korea	305	168	473
Pakistan	177	204	381
Iran	229	93	322

Source: Montgomery, op.cit., 177.

However, it has been argued that despite this largesse of treasure, technical help, and goods, the U.S. failed to provide for Vietnam's security precisely because its aid emphasized security, rather than ameliorating those economic and social problems which formed the basis for popular discontent. It is certainly true that the bulk of U.S. assistance was concentrated on security. Although from the table above Military Grants comprised only 25% of the total U.S. program 1955-1961, more than 75% of the economic aid the U.S. provided went into the GVN military budget. Out of every \$10 of U.S. economic aid the U.S. obligated for Vietnam, about \$8 were extended through an import-subsidization program. The U.S. would purchase goods with dollars outside Vietnam, sell them to Vietnamese importers for piasters, and then deposit this local currency in a drawing account for the GVN. This defense supporting assistance was very crucial to Diem, since in the period 1956-1960, some 43% of GVN public expenditures were allocated directly to the military for the armed forces and Self-Defense Corps (Scigliano, op.cit., 113).

U.S. DEFENSE SUPPORTING AID FOR GVN  
Calendar Year

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>Total</u>
Local currency							
Deposits ....	167.1	239.4	256.0	203.4	170.2	181.8	1218.4
Withdrawals in							
Support of GVN							
Defense Budget ....	97.1	202.5	204.5	152.9	176.0	166.6	999.6

Source: RAC-TP-232, op.cit., II, 20-21.

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\* MAAG, Vietnam had a TD authorization of 342 spaces; TERM, 350; the 1960 authorization for MAAG's amalgamation with TERM was 685.

As may be seen by comparing the totals above with the table on total U.S. aid, (ignoring the calendar year-fiscal year differences in accounting):

A. FY Economic Obligations 55-61	1543.6
B. FY 55-61 Economic Aid Expenditures	1292.3
C. Local Currency Deposits	1218.4
D. Withdrawals for Defense	999.6
$\frac{C}{B}$ is 94%; $\frac{D}{B}$ is 77%; $\frac{C}{A}$ is 79%; and $\frac{D}{A}$ is 65%.	

Approximately 94% of all money expended on U.S. aid found its way into counterpart funds, and of these expenditures about 77% went into the GVN defense budget. Hence, the GVN spent more than two-fifths of its total revenues, including over three-quarters of the funds it obtained from the U.S., on security.

The 23% or so of remaining U.S. economic aid was allocated principally to "project aid",

U.S. ECONOMIC AID TO VIETNAM  
(Millions of Dollars)

	<u>1955</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>
Total Economic							
FY Obligations ....	322.4	210.0	282.2	189.1	207.4	182.0	150.5
Total Project							
FY Obligations ....	7.2	22.7	48.9	29.3	36.4	28.9	13.4
% Project Aid ....	2.2	10.8	17.3	15.5	17.6	16.0	8.9

Source: Montgomery, op.cit., 289.

The 1959 Project Aid program was, like that of the other years, broken down among the following major categories:



U.S. ECONOMIC AID TO VIETNAM, 1959  
(Thousands of Dollars)

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>% of Project Aid</u>
Food and Agriculture	2,498	6.8
Industry and Mining	2,042	5.5
Transportation	21,335	58.5
Labor	7	.2
Health and Sanitation	1,936	5.3
Education	1,443	3.9
Public Administration and Safety	3,983	10.8
Community Development, Social Welfare, Housing	0	0
Technical Support	2,704	7.4
General and Miscellaneous	486	1.3
	<u>36,434</u>	

Source: Ibid

The predominance of aid to transportation in 1959 was typical of the other years:

TOTAL PROJECT AID, 1955-1961  
(Thousands of Dollars)

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>% of Project Aid</u>
Food and Agriculture	16,622	8.9
Industry and Mining	15,520	8.3
Transportation	75,921	40.7
Labor	76	---
Health and Sanitation	16,086	8.6
Education	9,296	5.0
Public Administration and Safety	26,437	14.2
Community Development, Social Welfare, Housing	8,641	4.6
Technical Support	12,260	6.6
General and Miscellaneous	6,045	3.2
Total Project Aid	<u>186,904</u>	

Source: Ibid

Even these figures conceal a further concentration on security. The "public administration" funds (14% of total) went chiefly to the police and state security services. The "transportation" category supported mainly the road building program, and while roads aided the economy, the routes were chosen for "strategic, military" purposes. For example, General Williams opposed

President Diem's plan to rebuild the coastal highway to Hue, and succeeded in asserting priority for a road into the Pleiku area of the Highlands. General Williams acceded to only so much of the Saigon-Hue road (Highway No. 1) as extended to Bien Hoa (some 20 miles north of Saigon) because "there is no road out of Saigon now that could take care of heavy military traffic and will not be until Bien Hoa Highway is completed."\*

The 20-mile stretch of highway to Bien Hoa cost more money than all project aid allocated for labor, community development, social welfare, health, and education in the years 1954-1961.\*\*

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\*Senate, Situation in Vietnam, op.cit., 287-288.

\*\* Scigliano, op.cit., 115.



## C. Recognition of Crisis, 1960

### 1. Country Team Assessment, March, 1960

By January 1960 communist terrorism and guerrilla action moved in U.S. estimates from the status of a long run threat to the viability of the Diem regime to crisis status as the GVN's "number one problem." In a long "Special Report on Internal Security Situation in Vietnam" (Incl 1 to Despatch #278 from Saigon, 7 March 1960), the U.S. Mission in Saigon submitted an appreciation of the problem which highlighted so many characteristics of the difficulties confronting Diem and U.S. policy that were to prove critical in subsequent years that it deserves extensive quotation and precis:

Internal security had once again become the primary problem of the GVN as a result of: (1) "intensification of Viet Cong guerrilla and terrorist activities"; (2) "weaknesses apparent in the GVN security forces"; and (3) "the growth of apathy and considerable dissatisfaction among the rural populace." "The situation has grown progressively more disturbing since shortly after the National Assembly elections at the end of August 1959, despite the fact that President Diem was claiming, to the end of December, that internal security was continuing to improve."

#### a. "Viet Cong Activity"

Government operations had intensified during the spring of 1955 when it increased its forces engaged in internal security operations, added precautions taken by the GVN during the period prior to and immediately following the August 30 National Assembly elections further suppressed VC activity. The upswing in VC operations first showed up in a sharp increase in assassinations and kidnappings in the last half of September. Where the total for assassinations in 1958 had been 193, there were 119 assassinations in the last four months of 1959 (for a yearly total of 233); in January 1960, there were to be 96 civilians killed and in February, 122. Meanwhile, significant Viet Cong attacks on GVN military forces also began in September, revealing characteristics on both the Viet Cong and GVN sides that were to become dishearteningly familiar in the next five years:

"The post-election intensification of VC attacks began with the completely successful engagement of two ARVN companies on September 26. The poor performance of ARVN during this operation exposed a number of weaknesses which have been commented upon by many CAS and MAAG sources in the Vietnamese Government. MAAG's evaluation of the factors contributing to ARVN's failure include security leaks, inadequate planning, lack of aggressive leadership, failure to communicate information to other participating units and the failure of supporting units to press forward to engage the VC (they were close enough to hear the sound of gunfire at the time). Another factor of importance illustrated in this ambush was the

confidence of the VC in their ability to successfully conduct such operations. This self assurance and aggressiveness appear to be characteristic of many actions taken by the VC since September and have probably contributed to the low state of morale reported in GVN security units by CAS sources." (Despatch 278 from Saigon, Encl. No. 1, p. 3)

It was incidents like this and "particularly an attack on an ARVN regimental post near Tay Ninh in January, that brought on "the full impact of the seriousness of the present situation":

"The Viet Cong attack on the Vietnamese Army installation near Tay Ninh on January 26 is a dramatic illustration of the increasingly aggressive tactics of the Viet Cong and of the difficulty the GVN is having in controlling the internal security situation. The audacity of the Viet Cong in conducting the attack, the likelihood of VC infiltration into ARVN, the indications of secret support of the VC by some of the local populace, the successful planning and coordination in carrying out the attack as opposed to apparent failure of ARVN which had been told there might be an attack to be sufficiently alert for such an attack and effectively counter once the attack had been launched, are indications of many of the problems faced by the GVN and discussed in this report." (Ibid, p. 1)

Armed propaganda operations involving large numbers of Viet Cong in daylight were a third category of Viet Cong activities.

"....The fact that the VC can, and have on a number of occasions, entered fair sized communities, spent several hours or a day propagandizing the population and then retired without meeting GVN resistance would indicate that the VC have an effective intelligence system." (Ibid, p. 5)

"CAS sources have reported a gradual increase of the infiltration of VC cadres and arms from the DRV over the past few months which has increased the VC strength to about 3000 in the Southwest. (Based on available information CAS estimates that the Viet Cong strength in all South Viet-Nam is presently 3000-5000 men.) Many of these new infiltrators, according to a CAS source who is a GVN Official, are cadres who were regrouped in the North at the time of the Geneva Accords and have had a number of years of intensive military and political training. The principal infiltration route of VC cadres from the North continues to be through Laos to Cambodia although reports are received of infiltration by sea. A CAS source with similar access reports that some of the cadres arriving in SVN from the North have the mission of establishing a VC headquarters to



include a general staff, a political section and a supply section and to effect a large-scale reorganization of VC cadres in the southwestern provinces (Fifth Military Region)." (Ibid, p. 7)

Behind all this activity were verbal indications of DRV intent:

"In May 1959, the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party passed a resolution or statement stating that the struggle for reunification would have to be carried out by all 'appropriate measures'. British observers have taken this to mean measures other than peaceful.

"'You must remember we will be in Saigon tomorrow, we will be in Saigon tomorrow', these words were spoken by Premier Pham van DONG in a conversation with French Consul Georges-Picot on September 12, 1959.

"In November, Pham van Dong twice told Canadian Commissioner Erichsen-Brown that 'we will drive the Americans into the Sea'." (Ibid., pp. 6-7)

b. "ARVN Weaknesses"

"....Numerous high-ranking GVN officials have very recently stressed the necessity of more anti-guerrilla training for the security forces. From a military point of view an outstanding deficiency in the GVN effort has been the government's inability, or lack of desire, to recognize the following factors:

(1) It is actively engaged in an internal war and, therefore, must take the measures which this situation entails.

(2) There is a great need for a strong central military command with wide powers for the conduct of internal security operations in the unpacified areas.

(3) There is a need for a capable, well-equipped, well-trained, centrally-controlled Civil Guard to take over from the Military in pacified areas.

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the apparent lack of success in the GVN attempts to reduce the internal threat of the VC until now has stemmed from the lack of unity of command in a single operational commander who has the means and the authority to utilize all of the potential in the area of operations without regard to province or regional boundaries and without regard to the existing political subdivision of the area. Unity of command is the most important basic principle

of administration lacking here. The Province Chief structure has caused a breakdown of coordination and a fragmentation of command structure which has blocked an effective attack on the internal security problem." (Ibid., pp. 8-9)

(The splitting of responsibility for internal security between the Province Chief, who controlled Provincial forces, and the military chain of command controlling ARVN was a constant complaint by MACV during the later Diem period.)

c. "Political Factors"

"....The VC reportedly estimate that 70% of the people in the rural areas of South Viet-Nam are either embittered by or indifferent toward the present government...." (Ibid., p. 8)

"It is highly unlikely that any final solution can be found to the internal security situation in South Viet-Nam if the GVN does not enjoy the support and cooperation of the rural population. At the present time indications are that the rural population is generally apathetic towards the Diem Government and there are signs of considerable dissatisfaction and silent opposition. In part this attitude appears to result from widespread fear of the Viet Cong and a belief that the GVN is relatively helpless to protect the rural population from Viet Cong depredations. Unfortunately the longer serious insecurity continues to exist in the countryside despite GVN efforts to control it, the more serious is the effect on the GVN's prestige. Another effect is a growing belief among the peasants that the Viet Cong will always be here as long as North Viet-Nam remains under Communist control and that they must adjust to live with them. (A realization of the long-range nature of the problem among officials responsible for dealing with it could be an advantage. In Malaya it has taken 11 years to reduce the security situation to the minimum, and it is even more difficult to deal with it in a divided country with long exposed frontiers).

"There appear to be other reasons contributing to the difficulty experienced by the GVN in attempting to rally the rural population:

(a) Until recently it was becoming more and more apparent that Diem was not being given accurate information on the internal security and political situation in rural areas. As late as the end of December, 1959, he was telling all callers how much better the internal security situation had become, despite many doubts raised by his listeners. Information was apparently being presented to him by local officials



in such a manner as to reflect well upon the officials giving it. The President's trips to the provinces have appeared to be carefully 'laid on' by local officials. The President himself cannot be absolved entirely from the blame, however, since his system of personal rule which permits direct appeal from the individual provincial authorities to himself, in a sort of intra-executive check and balance system, serves to further weaken the administrative apparatus.

"Recently, however, as indicated in the subsequent section on 'GVN Reactions', the Vice President and others who are not his usual informers on security matters have spoken frankly with him and he now seems well aware of the situation.

(b) Provincial and district authorities exercise almost autonomous control in the areas under their jurisdiction. Too often the personnel holding these positions have been incompetent, having been chosen for reason of party loyalty. Moreover, some have tended to view their jobs as a means to personal advancement or financial gain often at the cost of the population under their control. Press editorials have attacked local officials for extorting money from peasants, using torture to wring false confessions from innocent people and conducting themselves in such a manner as to reflect adversely on the prestige of the national government. In addition rumors continue to circulate among the population concerning the alleged nefarious activities of and favoritism shown to members of the Can Lao party. While officials have been largely unable to identify and put out of commission Viet Cong undercover cadres among the population, they have often arrested people on the basis of rumors or of denunciations by people who harbor only personal grudges. Police powers justified on the basis of the needs of internal security have reportedly been misused to extort money not only from the peasants but from land owners, merchants and professional people in the towns. This misuse of police powers and the kind of broad scale arrests on suspicion are weakening the support of the population for the regime. On the other hand, the application of swift, summary justice (such as the Special Military Tribunals were created to hand out) designed to protect the population against the Viet Cong threat, if carefully administered and 'advertised' as such, can do much to restore a feeling of security;

(c) While the GVN has made an effort to meet the economic and social needs of the rural populations through community development, the construction of schools, hospitals, roads, etc., these projects appear to have enjoyed only a measure of success in creating support for the government and, in fact, in many instances have resulted in resentment. Basically, the problem appears to be that such projects have been imposed on the people without adequate

psychological preparation in terms of the benefits to be gained. Since most of these projects call for sacrifice on the part of the population (in the form of allegedly 'volunteer' labor in the case of construction, time away from jobs or school in the case of rural youth groups, leaving homes and lands in the case of regrouping isolated peasants), they are bound to be opposed unless they represent a partnership effort for mutual benefit on the part of the population and the government. (See subsequent section on 'GVN Reactions' for indications of Diem's current awareness of this problem.)

"The situation may be summed up in the fact that the government has tended to treat the population with suspicion or to coerce it and has been rewarded with an attitude of apathy or resentment. The basic factor which has been lacking is a feeling of rapport between the government and the population. The people have not identified themselves with the government. There has been a general lack of 'a sense of mission' in the building of the country among both the local population and local authorities." (Ibid., pp. 9, 10, 11, 12; footnotes excluded)

## 2. Special National Intelligence Estimate, August 1960

The Country Team report on internal security concluded that Diem was now aware of the gravity of the problem and was taking some countermeasures. But the inadequacy of his response was recognized in a Special NIE of 23 August 1960 (SNIE 63.1-60). The VC terrorism had continued to intensify: in the first five months of 1960, 780 government officials and sympathizers were assassinated by insurgents. Since January armed attacking units had been operating over wider areas than at any time since 1954.

" . . . Support from North Vietnam appears to have increased over the past several months. In particular, senior cadres and military supplies such as communications equipment are believed to be moving south through Laos and Cambodia and by junk along the eastern coastline." (SNIE 63.1-60, p. 3)

But along with this further increase in communist pressure came increasing threats to stability from non-communist quarters reminiscent of the 1954-55 period:

" . . . At the same time, grievances against the government, which have long been accumulating, have become increasingly urgent and articulate."

Throughout this August estimate, dual threats from communist and domestic opposition were presented in parallel, with priority



going to the non-communists. In its discussion of Diem's political problems, this estimate followed closely the analysis of the Mission report of six months earlier. The problems were seen as not only continuing, but intensifying:

"Discontent with the Diem government has been prevalent for some time among intellectuals and elite circles and, to a lesser extent, in labor and urban business groups. Criticism by these elements focuses on Ngo family rule, especially the roles of the President's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Madame Nhu; the pervasive influence of the Can Lao, the semi-clandestine apparatus of the regime; Diem's virtual one-man rule; and the growing evidence of corruption in high places. In late April, 18 prominent Vietnamese publicly petitioned Diem to 'liberalize the regime, expand democracy, grant minimum civil rights, (and) recognize the opposition in order to let the people speak without fear.' This unprecedented public attack on Diem by a non-Communist group may embolden other urban elements to become more vocal.

"A new and even more important element in the political situation is the growing criticism of Diem's leadership within government circles, including the official bureaucracy and military; this criticism has become more intense than at any time since 1956. Since the early part of this year, Vice President Tho, other members of the cabinet, and middle echelon officials have made known their serious concern over Diem's handling of the internal security problem and have privately criticized the power and influence exerted by Nhu and his entourage. In addition, there is considerable uneasiness concerning the operations and activities of the Can Lao organization.

"Although most of the Vietnamese peasants are politically apathetic, they also have their grievances against the government. These include the ineptitude and arrogance of many local and provincial officials, the lack of effective protection from Viet Cong demands in many parts of the country, the harshness with which many peasants have been forced to contribute their labor to government programs, and the unsettling economic and social effects of the agroville (government-sponsored settlements) program. As a consequence, Diem's government is lacking in positive support among the people in the countryside." (Ibid., pp. 1-2)

Although the estimate confirmed that Diem had become concerned over the deteriorating internal security situation, he appeared still to underestimate the non-communist political threat:

" . . . He still tends to discount the amount of discontent both in the countryside and among urban elements. Although he has

taken some steps to meet the internal security problem, he tends to view it almost entirely in military terms. He believes that increased military activity against the Viet Cong, along with an expansion of the agrovillage program, will greatly improve internal security. He has been openly contemptuous of the views of oppositionists in Saigon and regards them as uninformed and dupes of the Communists. Diem also has failed to take any major steps against corruption and arbitrary conduct on the part of the Can Lao organization."

After this discussion of the political situation, the estimate discussed the Viet Cong pressures as: "aggravating many of the government's problems." (Ibid., p. 2) (Underlining added) The earlier report on internal security had commented, "It is not completely clear why the DRV has chosen this particular time to mount an intensified guerrilla campaign in South Vietnam," (Saigon 278, p. 2) and had advanced several hypotheses including Diem's view that it represented "a somewhat desperate attempt to disrupt the progress of South Vietnam," in the face of steady GVN progress and DRV failure to interfere successfully with the National Assembly elections in August. The list of hypotheses in March did not include the possibility that the communists might have judged that the political situation within SVN had significantly deteriorated (earlier foreseen as the likely occasion for an increase in overt communist activities), but the August estimate emphasized this possibility.

" . . . The indications of increasing dissatisfaction with the Diem government have probably encouraged the Hanoi regime, supported and guided by the Chinese Communists, to take stronger action at this time . . . given ' . . . a sizable and effective indigenous guerrilla apparatus responsive to Communist control'; and 'a government lacking in positive support from its people'; . . . " (SME 63.1-60, p. 3)

The estimate concluded with the pregnant comment that:

"In countering the Viet Cong challenge, Diem faces many of the same problems which confronted the French during the Indo-China War . . . "

Some relevant portions of much earlier U.S. intelligence estimates might be recorded here:

"Despite these advances [which included 'the relocation of scattered villages in the Delta into centralized and defensible sites' as 'an important step toward the eventual "pacification" of heavily infiltrated areas' and increases in the size of the Vietnamese National Army] Vietnam still lacks the degree of



political strength essential for the mobilization of the country's resources . . . elected local councils have no real power, promised land reform and other social and economic reforms which might generate popular support had not left the planning stage and the Vietnamese government is handicapped by incompetent cabinet ministers and the lack of competent administrators." (NIE 9 of 4 June 1953, p. 3)

"Finally, unless the French Union forces prove strong enough to provide security for the Vietnamese population, it will not be possible to sweep the guerrillas out of the areas as planned. Not only will the populace fail generally to provide the intelligence required to rout the guerrillas but, as in the past, they will frequently give warning of the presence of the French Union forces, thus permitting the guerrillas to take cover and later to emerge when the danger is past." (Ibid., p. 5)

Seven years later, the estimate of August 1960 was pointing out:

" . . . Viet Cong guerrilla units have succeeded in exploiting their natural advantages of surprise, mobility, and initiative. In many of their areas of operations, they have exploited the tendency of the largely passive population to accommodate to their presence and thereby avoid reprisals. In some areas of operations, however, they have obtained the active cooperation of the local population." (SNIE 63.1-60, p. 3)

"In the absence of more effective government measures to protect the peasants and to win their positive cooperation, the prospect is for expansion of the areas of Viet Cong control in the countryside, particularly in the southwestern provinces.

"Dissatisfaction and discontent with the government will probably continue to rise unless the security situation improves and unless Diem can be brought to reduce the corruption and excesses of his regime . . . "

The conclusions of the estimate were the most ominous since 1956:

"Developments within South Vietnam over the past six months indicate a trend adverse to the stability and effectiveness of President Diem's government . . . "

"Although Diem's personal position and that of his government are probably not now in danger, the marked deterioration since January of this year is disturbing. These adverse trends are not

irreversible, but if they remain unchecked, they will almost certainly in time cause the collapse of Diem's regime. We do not anticipate that this will occur within the period of this estimate. However, if Diem is not able to alter present trends and the situation deteriorates substantially, it is possible during the period of this estimate that the government will lose control over much of the countryside and a political crisis will ensue." (Ibid., p. 1)

The U.S. view of its policy in Vietnam could not yet be said to be "crisis management"; but a crisis was portended..

### 3. Contrasting DOD and State Appreciations

The August SNIE notwithstanding, however, subsequent analyses appearing in the Department of State and the Department of Defense disclosed differing views on the relative urgency of the threat to Diem from communist machination as opposed to simple rebellion. In general, Department of Defense papers tended to emphasize the threat from rural, communist-led insurgents, and to highlight relative military capabilities; Defense papers usually deprecated the significance or urgency of non-communist political dissent in South Vietnam. In contrast, analyses by the Department of State in Washington and Ambassador Durbrow in Saigon recognized, at least in principle, the importance of both the military threat posed by the VC, and the problems which stemmed from Diem's political insolvency. Department of Defense analyses, therefore, usually regarded proposals by State or Saigon which aimed at pressuring Diem into a more enlightened domestic policy as being competitive with measures to improve internal security. The Pentagon and its field commands tended to regard military assistance to Diem as the key to the situation. Indeed, the Pentagon tended to oppose U.S. leverage on Diem because it might jeopardize his confidence in the U.S. and cooperation from him which was essential to improve his military posture.

The divergence in view sketched above emerges in several papers written not long after the 30 August 1960 SNIE. For example, alarmed by the ominous conclusion of the SNIE's Deputy Secretary of Defense Douglas asked ASD/ISA for comments and recommendations on how to remedy the "deteriorating situation in South Vietnam." As input for the reply, Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, one of Ngo Dinh Diem's earliest U.S. advisors, wrote a memorandum holding that:

"As noted by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, conditions in Vietnam are deteriorating. The key element in the situation is the activity of the Viet Cong. While criticism of Diem's government in metropolitan areas adds to his problems and interacts with Viet Cong plans, the Viet Cong remains the primary threat to security . . ." (Memo for Admiral E. J. O'Donnell,



Regional Director, Far East, ISA, from Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale, OSO/OSD, 13 September 1960, Subject: Possible Course of Action in Vietnam, p. 1) (Underlining added)

To the end of meeting the threat from the Viet Cong, Lansdale suggested (among other items):

" . . . The emphasis of the MAAG function should be shifted from purely training and organizational advice in preparation for defense against external aggression to include on-the-spot advice and assistance in the conduct of tactical operations against the Viet Cong." (Underlining added)

" . . . Concomitantly, the MAAG should be staffed to a greater extent with officers skilled in the conduct of counter-guerrilla operations and who are capable of operating in the field. This might include Marines for amphibious instruction on Mekong River operations . . . "

" . . . During the emergency, the Civil Guard should be temporarily put under the Ministry of Defense in order to integrate the activities of the ARVN and the Civil Guard. The Ambassador's concern that the Civil Guard will lose all identity as a civil police force, if this action is taken, is invalid, providing a strong US position to the contrary is announced and maintained." (Ibid., pp. 1-2)

(Subsequent development of the Regional Forces, which grew out of the Civil Guard after transfer to the Ministry of Defense in December 1960, showed this particular concern of the Ambassador to have been a valid one -- whatever the countervailing advantages of the move -- in that its role and capabilities as a police force atrophied almost entirely; no "strong U.S. position to the contrary" was, however, taken by MAAG, AID, or CAS.)

" . . . Emphasis on civic action type activities by the ARVN should be encouraged and advisory and material assistance in this field furnished through MAP and ICA channels."

" . . . Most importantly for the purpose of strengthening the morale of the Vietnamese, President Diem should be informed as soon as possible through appropriate channels of the gravity with which the US government views the internal security situation, of our intent to provide material assistance, and of our unswerving support to him in this time of crisis." (Underlining added) (Ibid., p. 2)

Meanwhile, Ambassador Durbrow in Saigon proceeded to elaborate upon the various political threats described in the August 30 SNIE. A week after the August 1960 SNIE was published, Ambassador Durbrow

found it appropriate to send an assessment of the potentialities of various groups for coups and demonstrations in the short run. Among these were:

"1. Peasants. Various factors discontent exist such as lack of adequate protection against communist attacks and pressures, low prices paddy, compulsory labor on agrovilles and other projects, and arbitrary methods of authorities. Diem has taken some steps to try alleviate sources of discontent (our G-79) but it is important he take others because peasantry represent key to success or failure communist guerrilla warfare in countryside and thus to gradual undermining of regime. However, any sudden demonstration or coup against GVN likely to center in Saigon and seems improbable that peasantry in view lack organization, transport problems, etc. would play significant role therein." (Saigon 538 to SecState, 5 September 1960, p. 1, Section 1 of 2)

(It is worth noting that this list of peasant grievances against the regime, like most such analyses by CIA or State, includes a number of separate factors, of which "lack of protection against communist attacks and pressures" is only one. This assessment of peasant attitudes toward the GVN was in some contrast to: (a) other analyses, particularly originating in the Department of Defense, but also from Diem himself, emphasizing lack of security as the single significant peasant grievance, or the overwhelmingly predominant one, or the basis of the others; and (b) effective U.S. advice and influence, which increasingly centered upon the security problem.)

Urban groups, including labor and students (who were just beginning to show political ferment) were judged unlikely to begin a demonstration but increasingly likely to join one begun by other oppositionists either within or outside the government. Dissatisfaction with the regime existed even among Catholic refugees, some of this stemming "paradoxically . . . from what they feel is too heavily Catholic leadership of regime (with potential reaction to follow) . . . " (This worry appeared less paradoxical in the summer of 1963.)

As for the Army:

" . . . Some discontent exists because of political promotions and favoritism throughout armed forces structure. Some disturbing indications of possible development spirit frustration and defeatism in fight against Viet Cong also received, such as statement allegedly made by General Duong Van Minh that for every Viet Cong killed by armed forces government creating ten in their rear; however indications are that generals remain imbued by non-political approach and that discontent is not of such



proportions that any general is ready to take initiative in leading coup. We cannot of course exclude emergence of a 'Kong Le' from ranks below general but key units in and around Saigon are commanded by officers believed to be close and loyal to Diem." (Saigon 538 to SecState, 5 September 1960, Section 2 of 2, p. 1)

Two months later, in November 1960, an abortive "Kong Le" coup came close to succeeding, led by LTC Nguyen Chanh Thi, one of those believed to have been most close and loyal to Diem.

The cable concluded that:

" . . . Real possibility demonstrations in Saigon exist . . . any demonstration more likely to be initially loyal protests calling for changes in policies and personnel around Diem but could develop into anti-Diem riot . . . " (Ibid., p. 2)

Ten days later, Durbrow sent a long analysis of the threats confronting Diem, with recommendations for counter-measures, as a precursor to presenting Diem with strong U.S. representations on the need for changes. This discussion well expressed the complex problems in which Diem was enmeshed, all of which had to be met adequately if the regime was to survive; and it was an unusually explicit listing of the sort of "reforms," so often alluded to since the Eisenhower letter of October 1954, felt to be required if the Diem regime were to be politically viable.

"As indicated our 495 and 538 Diem regime confronted by two separate but related dangers. Danger from demonstrations or coup attempt in Saigon could occur earlier; likely to be predominantly non-communistic in origin but communists can be expected to endeavor infiltrate and exploit any such attempt. Even more serious danger is gradual Viet Cong extension of control over countryside which, if current communist progress continues, would mean loss free Viet-Nam to communists. These two dangers are related because communist successes in rural areas embolden them to extend their activities to Saigon and because non-communist temptation to engage in demonstrations or coup is partly motivated by sincere desire prevent communist take-over in Viet-Nam.

"Essentially two sets of measures required to meet these two dangers. For Saigon danger essentially political and psychological measures required. For countryside danger security measures as well as political, psychological and economic measures needed. However both sets measures should be carried out simultaneously and to some extent individual steps will be aimed at both dangers." (Saigon 624 to SecState, Section 1 of 2, 16 September 1960, p. 1, underlining added)

The Ambassador proposed to "have frank and friendly talk with Diem and explain our serious concern about present situation and his political position."

" . . . I realize some measures I am recommending are drastic and would be most unpolitic for an Ambassador to make under normal circumstances. But conditions here are by no means normal. Diem government is in quite serious danger. Therefore, in my opinion prompt and even drastic action is called for. I am well aware that Diem has in past demonstrated astute judgment and has survived other serious crises. Possibly his judgment will prove superior to ours this time, but I believe nevertheless we have no alternative but to give him our best judgment of what we believe is required to preserve his government. While Diem obviously resented my frank talks earlier this year and will probably resent even more suggestions outlined below, he has apparently acted on some of our earlier suggestions and might act on at least some of the following . . . " (Ibid., p. 2)

Limiting his recommendations to the political and economic sphere, since other messages had dealt with security recommendations, Durbrow suggested measures, including:

" . . . Rumors about Mr. and Mrs. Nhu are creating growing dissension within country and seriously damage political position of Diem Government. Whether rumors true or false, politically important fact is that more and more people believe them to be true. Therefore, becoming increasingly clear that in interest Diem Government some action should be taken. In analagous situations in other countries as important, useful government personalities have had to be sacrificed for political reasons. I would suggest therefore that President might appoint Nhu to Ambassadorship abroad.

" . . . Similarly Tran Kim Tuyen, Nhu's henchman and Head of Secret Intelligence Service, should be sent abroad in diplomatic capacity because of his growing identification in public mind with alleged secret police methods of repression and control." (Ibid., p. 3)

" . . . One or two cabinet ministers from opposition should be appointed to demonstrate Diem's desire to establish Government of National Union in fight against VC.

" . . . Make public announcement of disbandment of Can Lao Party or at least its surfacing, with names and positions of all members made known publicly. Purpose this step would be to eliminate atmosphere of fear and suspicion and reduce public belief in favoritism and corruption, all of which party's semi-covert status has given rise to.



" . . . Permit National Assembly wider legislative initiative and area of genuine debate and bestow on it authority to conduct, with appropriate publicity, public investigations of any department of government with right to question any official except President himself. This step would have three-fold purpose: (A) Find some mechanism for dispelling through public investigation constantly generated rumors about government and its personalities; (B) Provide people with avenue recourse against arbitrary actions by some government officials; (C) Assuage some of intellectual opposition to government.

" . . . Require all government officials to declare publicly their property and financial holdings and give National Assembly authority to make public investigation of these declarations in effort dispel rumors of corruption."

" . . . Adopt following measures for immediate enhancement of peasant support of government: (A) Establish mechanism for increasing price peasant will receive for paddy crop beginning to come on market in December, either by direct subsidization or establishment state purchasing mechanism; (B) Institute modest payment for all corvee labor; (C) Subsidize agrovillage families along same lines as land resettlement families until former on feet economically; (D) Increase compensation paid to youth corps. If Diem asks how these measures are to be financed I shall suggest through increased taxes or increased deficit financing, and shall note that under certain circumstances reasonable deficit financing becomes a politically necessary measure for governments. I should add that using revenues for these fundamental and worthy purposes would be more effective than spending larger and larger sums on security forces, which, while they are essential and some additional funds for existing security forces may be required, are not complete answer to current problems." (Saigon 624 to SecState, Section 2 of 2, 16 September 1960, pp. 1-2, underlining added)

Finally, in requesting State Department approval for an approach to Diem along these lines, Durbrow concluded with a recommendation on the nature of the political objectives the U.S. should set with respect to the GVN:

"We believe U.S. should at this time support Diem as best available Vietnamese leader, but should recognize that overriding U.S. objective is strongly anti-communist Vietnamese government which can command loyal and enthusiastic support of widest possible segments of Vietnamese people, and is able to carry on effective fight against communist guerrillas. If Diem's position in country continues deteriorate as result failure adopt proper political, psychological, economic and security measures, it

may become necessary for U.S. government to begin consideration alternative courses of action and leaders in order achieve our objective." (Ibid., p. 3, underlining added)

In its reply (Deptel 581 to Saigon, 7 Oct 60), the State Department concurred on the necessity of an approach to Diem on moves to increase his popular support. Among other comments, it was suggested that Durbrow state that after thorough study it was his " . . . carefully considered view GVN will face increasingly difficult internal political situation unless dramatic moves made to reverse present deteriorating trends. Small or gradual moves not repeat not adequate." On the question of Nhu and Tuyen, "since this important demarche would be most unpalatable," careful handling was stressed.

" . . . Agree main point should be that whether rumors true or false we are convinced that if they ignored, regime likely lose support it needs in struggle against Communists and that in all governments, such decisions have to be made . . . convinced decision regarding Nhu and Tuyen would remove major cause of resentment against regime. It would, we believe; increase support of Diem within the GVN and among the educated classes. Support these groups is as necessary as support of peasants . . ." (Deptel 581 to Saigon, 7 Oct 60, underlining added)

Among other suggestions, the Department proposed that Diem fix and announce a date on which villages would be asked to elect at least some of their own officials. In connection with Diem's program of agrovilles, the Department raised problems that were to recur repeatedly in the context of the later program in strategic hamlets.

"Suggest inform Diem we agree agrovillage program good way meet security problem but are concerned re execution. Urge he announce corvee labor on agrovilles and elsewhere be paid and agrovillage families receive some aid (possibly rice) during period readjustment (could be less than in High Plateau since Delta peasants still produce rice their own fields.) If he asks how such measures to be paid for, concur suggested reply re higher taxes and deficit financing. Devaluation should also be emphasized. Diem might announce heavier taxes on rich for benefit peasants and agrovillage program. You might inquire whether training program for Vietnamese administrators and technicians should be increased to provide personnel needed for agrovilles and other insecure areas. Also might inquire re status information teams assigned to explain to peasants why they should leave homes and tombs ancestors to go to agrovilles." (Ibid., underlining added)

(From these implied criticisms of the execution of the agrovillage concept, it could be -- correctly -- inferred that many of the defects



in "implementation" later associated with the strategic hamlet program were already discernible in the administration of the agrovilles by the Diem regime.)

One dissent by the Department from Durbrow's recommendations was on the Can Lao:

"As to surfacing" or abolishing Can Lao suggest that to ask for this and removal Nhush and Tuyen simultaneously would be too much . . . If considered necessary, question could be raised later." (Ibid.)

On 14 October, Ambassador Durbrow had his opportunity for frank discussion alone with Diem. He began by reading, in French, a 14-page paper containing the suggestions agreed to by the Department.

" . . . Before reading text I stated that on October 13 I had been in Viet-Nam for three and one half years, had found my assignment edifying, interesting, and most worthwhile. I mentioned solid and worthwhile progress I had noted in country since 1957 and congratulated President on his many fine accomplishments. I then stated that since I admired his courage and determination I personally desired to do all I could to help him, particularly in these trying times. I added I personally, and other friends of his here as well as those in Washington, have been giving much thought about how we might be helpful to him. Results of our thinking led to conclusion that we could be most helpful if we should make several suggestions which I could put to him in a frank manner as a friend. I then read the paper.

" . . . When I finished reading President stated that most of suggestions I had made conformed to his basic ideas, but added as much as he would like to put these into effect, stepped-up activities of the Viet Cong made it most difficult. He added that many people have been intimidated by Viet Cong and some had been won over so that it would be difficult to carry out some of steps regarding countryside. I replied while I realized difficulties I was firmly convinced after most careful consideration that it essential now to take many if not all of these suggested steps on a calculated risk basis in order to create the psychological shock which I believed essential at this time. President made no further comment except to tell me that he would consider the suggestions I had given him.

"I then again begged his indulgence and asked if I could bring up a most sensitive and delicate matter which I felt in his interest and in interest of Viet-Nam I should discuss very frankly. From notes in French which I read but did not leave

with him, (copy by pouch) I discussed growing criticism of his brother and Madam Nhu, as well as Dr. Tuyen and suggested that they should be assigned abroad. Diem did not interrupt me but assumed somewhat grim, and I detected, slightly hurt manner. His only comment was that these rumors about the Nhuses were spread by communists. I replied that I was sure that communists were doing all they could to spread such rumors but I repeated that the unfortunate part about it is that more and more people are believing these reports - Vietnamese loyal to him, those who might be considered in the opposition, foreign civilians and foreign diplomats to say nothing of the press. I repeated, as I had previously, these reports were seriously damaging prestige of his regime.

"After discussing the Nhuses, I again apologized, first of all for bringing up this personal and sensitive subject, as well as the other suggestions I had made. I again asked his indulgence and forgiveness for speaking so frankly and added I hoped he would understand that I was talking as a sincere friend."  
(Saigon 802 to SecState, 15 October 1960, corrected copy)

The same day, September 16, 1960, as the Ambassador's recommendations for a political demarche to Diem, the JCS informed CINCPAC and the Chief of MAAG that they and the Deputy SecDef had approved a CINCPAC draft plan for counterinsurgency operations by the Government of South Vietnam. This had its origins in CINCPAC's staff study of April 26, 1960, subsequently endorsed by the JCS on June 6, 1960, with the recommendations:

"a. That appropriate U.S. Government Departments and agencies encourage the Vietnamese and Laotian Governments to adopt a national emergency organization to integrate civil and military resources under centralized direction for the conduct of counter-insurgency operations.

"b. That these U.S. departments and agencies encourage the Vietnamese and Laotian Governments to develop coordinated national plans for the progressive reduction of Communist influence.

"c. That these U.S. Government departments and agencies be authorized and directed to support the training for and conduct of emergency operations . . ."

"e. That the U.S. Government provide sufficient materiel and budgetary support to insure the successful accomplishment of these emergency campaigns.



"The JCS also recommended that the Secretary of Defense initiate the action to obtain such U.S. Government support of counter-insurgency operations in Laos and Vietnam." (CINCPAC study and JCS memorandum 232-60, June 6, 1960, enclosed in letter, Rear Admiral E. J. O'Donnell, USN (Director, Far East Region, ISA, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense), to J. Graham Parsons (Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs), September 16, 1960, secret (file 611.51K); cited in Department of State, Division of Historical Policy Research, Research Project No. 630, January 1965, Recent American Policy and Diplomacy Concerning Vietnam, 1960-1963, pp. 10-11)

In a subsequent memo for the Secretary of Defense (JCSM-382-60, dated August 30, 1960) the JCS asserted that

"'encouraging the Government of South Vietnam to adopt a national course of action designed to reduce the growing threat of Communist insurgent actions' was vital to the continued freedom of that country and an important action 'to preclude the necessity for implementing U.S. or SEATO war plans.'" (Cited in Department of State Research Project No. 630, January 1965, "Recent American Policy . . .," op. cit.)

The draft plan forwarded to MAAG stressed organizational matters, including the formation of a National Emergency Council and a Director of Operations to integrate civil and military efforts and formulate the Vietnamese National Counter-Insurgency Plan, with sub-councils at regional, provincial and village levels, but concluded with a concept of operations:

"(1) Politico/Military Operations. In order to provide protection which the people require, it is necessary to exercise more than an ordinary degree of control over the population. Among the more important operations required are those for exercising control in such manner as to isolate insurgents and sympathizers from the support of the populace. Such techniques as registration and identification, food control, and control of movement, should be implemented as offering the best prospects for success. Control measures instituted should require support by psychological warfare and information programs to gain and maintain popular confidence and support.

"(2) Military Operations. An effective continuing defensive system should remain in place, with a capability for reinforcing the permanent local security establishment since it is not sufficient temporarily to defeat or suppress insurgents or to establish control in one area and then move the counter-insurgency forces to a new area thus allowing insurgents to

re-establish themselves. The regular military establishment of South Vietnam has the capability to fight either guerrillas or external aggressors. Militia type home guards and civil guards should be trained and equipped. Accelerated efforts should be undertaken to develop the para-military and police forces. For the duration of the emergency campaign, operational control of all security activities should be under centralized direction. Border and Coastal Patrol operations, being fundamental to the campaign to prevent insurgents receiving support from areas outside of South Vietnam, should be closely coordinated with Vietnamese ground, air, and naval operations in the counter-insurgency campaign. These operations should also be coordinated with Cambodia and Laos, as feasible." (Defense 982994 to CINCPAC, 162156Z Sep 60)

The State Department, accepting the recommendations of the Department of Defense, sent a State-Defense message instructing the Ambassador of the country team to develop an overall plan

" . . . for encouraging and supporting GVN in national emergency effort defeat insurgents and bring about order and stability in that country. Such action determined necessary in order check disruptive influences which could cause disintegration of the Government and the possible loss of South Viet-Nam to Communist Bloc." (Deptel 658 to AmEmbassy Saigon, 19 October 1960)

Before making known such a plan to the GVN it would be reviewed in Washington and a U.S. position established.

After these somewhat differing analyses of the problem had been recorded, an abortive coup by troops which had been regarded as among the most loyal in ARVN, the airborne brigade, appeared to validate concerns (expressed by the State Department and the August 30 SNIE) over non-communist dissatisfactions with the Diem regime. Yet Washington interpretations of the coup and its aftermath were that it confirmed not only the Ambassador, but his critics within the DOD in their respective convictions.

Ambassador Durbrow described certain measures of reform promised by Diem after the coup but commented:

" . . . It is hoped that these reforms are not just reforms on surface with little or no substance. Despite these signs, there is basically quite serious under-current malaise and skepticism whether effective reforms will be taken soon enough. This uneasy feeling not confined to intellectuals or opposition groups; but to sizeable number of others, i.e., cabinet



Ministers, other loyal officials, deputies and some military. Nhu and Thuan have indicated that Diem, who not particularly interested fundamental political matters is resisting some suggested basic reforms." (From Saigon 1151, 4 December 1960)

The Ambassador reiterated the emphasis in his September analysis both upon the threat from non-communist quarters and the measures necessary to reduce it; however, it was apparent that one effect of the coup had been to make one of the most important measures, the transfer of Nhu, politically infeasible at the time.

"Just below surface there is much talk about another coup unless Diem relaxes some controls, puts in effective reforms, takes more effective action to fight VC and give protection to population. There is still strong under-current of resentment against entourage but because any action he took this score would be under pressure and indicate weakness, and particularly his resentment of press stories about entourage, coupled with fact Diem feels he needs Nhu as loyal adviser, prospects Diem will transfer Nhu to other work or abroad not in sight, at least for some time. Despite this malaise and feeling about entourage, most critics still respect Diem as only leader at moment but this feeling could easily change unless he takes fairly drastic action to meet criticism and basic desires most strata population.

"We believe also that unless Diem takes early effective action on political front, coup has increased chances for development neutralism and for anti-Americanism among those critical of GVN. Despite our close identification with Diem and his regime critics have not to date bracketed us with government in expressing their dissatisfaction. Many have told us however that only we can induce Diem adopt changes which will save his regime, thus indicating they look to us to help them. If, after failure of clearly anti-Communist coup attempt to bring about changes we are not successful in inducing Diem to make peaceful changes, critics may well become frustrated, turn against U.S., seek other means bring about change and might even move toward neutralist position in middle. If Viet Cong guerrilla successes in countryside continue at rate registered during past year, this will also increase frustration of armed forces and population and could provide soil in which neutralism may grow." (Ibid., pp. 2-3)

Since Diem was assuring the mission he was working on reforms, the Ambassador concluded " . . . we should not at moment press too hard," but it was still necessary to take appropriate

opportunities to urge Diem and others to adopt at least the most important suggestions of his demarche of October 14; moreover, the Ambassador now emphasized the necessity for leverage, as well as persuasion, in inducing him both to institute political reforms and to accept the basic principles of the MAAG Counter-Insurgency Plan:

"Since it far from certain Diem will introduce sufficiently appealing and effective new programs and use his present security forces in most efficacious manner, we must find suitable means to bring pressure on him. As I outlined in Embtel 1105 as well as in memorandum this subject (letter to Parsons Nov 8) I am convinced, even if we eventually should agree, that we should not now accord his request for 20,000 additional force or concur in his unilateral action to raise force level (Chief MAAG 1537 Dec 1 - copy JCS). To do so without his having relaxed controls, instituted effective reforms and having permitted efficient use present forces, would not save the day for Diem but might even induce him follow his instinct to rely primarily on use of force both to control population and fight VC. While I am not fully convinced need for extra 20,000 men, I would be willing to concur in such addition if careful study by all concerned concurred in this recommendation. (MAAG views on urgent need for 20,000 increase forwarded Parsons my letter Nov 30th) therefore, suggested this matter be carefully studied Washington and if final recommendation is favorable it be kept secret as ace in the hole to grant Diem provided he has taken other necessary steps which are to me much more fundamental, and provided he needs extra force after taking more essential steps. If, for instance, at the beginning next year he has taken effective steps along lines suggested above and it is still considered he needs increased force level we could so inform him then. But in meantime, in view his threat to raise force level unilaterally, I should be instructed soonest to taut suitable opportunity to state while force level increase is under consideration Washington cannot now see its way clear to grant such increase when other more important steps are essential at present in fight against VC and to make further progress Viet-Nam.

"In summary, situation in Viet-Nam is highly dangerous to US interests. Communists are engaged in large-scale guerrilla effort to take over countryside and oust Diem's Government. Their activities have steadily increased in intensity throughout this year. In addition Diem is faced with widespread popular dissatisfaction with his government's inability to stem the communist tide and its own heavy-handed methods of operation. It seems clear that if he is to remain in power he must meet



these two challenges by improvements in his methods of conducting war against communists and in vigorous action to build greater popular support. We should help and encourage him to take effective action. Should he not do so, we may well be forced, in not too distant future, to undertake difficult task of identifying and supporting alternate leadership." (Saigon 1151 to SecState, 4 December 1960, Section 2 of 2, pp.2-3)

At the same time that Durbrow turned to an emphasis on pressure, his dispatch contained strong hints that U.S. ability to influence Diem and his immediate entourage without pressure might have declined, as an immediate result of the abortive coup and the perceived relation of the U.S. to it.

"Nhu and Diem still deeply rankled particularly by critical American press stories about autocratic regime and entourage, and Diem made the ridiculous statement to Ladejinsky November 30th that he believes some Americans may have backed coup because one of coup leaders, Colonel Dong, 'told him so during negotiations.' This may represent rationalization blame others not selves . . . both Nhu and Diem now expressing deep displeasure because Americans equated Diem regime with rebels because both anti-Communists and therefore we urged both sides negotiate. While under circumstances their attitude understandable, we have made point clear to them that we did all in our power to prevent that he should be given active role in any government established . . . " (Ibid., Section 1 of 2, p. 2)

At best, a state of affairs in which Diem believed we had been sympathetic to a rebellion against him could only be ominous for our relationship with him, and Durbrow implicitly acknowledged this in recommending a conciliatory gesture of reassurance, of a type that was to characterize our relations with the Diem regime in subsequent years:

"Since Diem believes we do not understand seriousness of VC threat and he suspects we may have encouraged rebels, we should make arrangements immediately to ship six H-34 helicopters which are not only most urgently needed fight VC effectively but would reassure Diem we trying give effective help." (Ibid., Section 2 of 2, p. 2)

In the eyes of those who regarded Diem as the indispensable kingpin of effective anti-communist policy in Vietnam, and thus a mutual feeling of confidence and trust between Diem and the U.S. of paramount importance, such a gesture seemed pitifully inadequate -- and, indeed, Durbrow's continuing presence as Ambassador possibly counter-productive -- in the situation prevailing after the attempted coup. For example, another Lansdale memorandum:

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

From: BrigGen Lansdale, OSO/OSD

Subj: Vietnam

As desired by you, I visited Vietnam 2-14 January 1961. After twelve days of intensive looking and listening over some old familiar ground, I have come to the following personal convictions:

- a. 1961 promises to be a fateful year for Vietnam.
- b. The Communist Viet Cong hope to win back Vietnam south of the 17th Parallel this year, if at all possible, and are much further along towards accomplishing this objective than I had realized from reading the reports received in Washington.
- c. The free Vietnamese, and their government, probably will be able to do no more than postpone eventual defeat - - unless they find a Vietnamese way of mobilizing their total resources and then utilizing them with spirit.
- d. The U. S. team in Vietnam will be unable to help the Vietnamese with real effectiveness, unless the U.S. system of their operation is changed sufficiently to free these Americans to do the job that needs doing, and unless they do it with sensitive understanding and wisdom.
- e. If Free Vietnam is won by the Communists, the remainder of Southeast Asia will be easy pickings for our enemy, because the toughest local force on our side will be gone. A Communist victory also would be a major blow to U. S. prestige and influence, not only in Asia but throughout the world, since the world believes that Vietnam has remained free only through U.S. help. Such a victory would tell leaders of other governments that it doesn't pay to be a friend of the U.S., and would be an even more marked lesson than Laos.
- f. Vietnam can be kept free, but it will require a changed U.S. attitude, plenty of hard work and patience, and a new spirit by the Vietnamese. The Viet Cong have been pushing too hard militarily to get their roots down firmly and can be defeated by an inspired and determined effort.

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g. Ngo Dinh Diem is still the only Vietnamese with executive ability and the required determination to be an effective President. I believe there will be another attempt to get rid of him soon, unless the U.S. makes it clear that we are backing him as the elected top man. If the 11 November coup had been successful, I believe that a number of highly selfish and mediocre people would be squabbling among themselves for power while the Communists took over. The Communists will be more alert to exploit the next coup attempt. At present, most Vietnamese oppositionists believe that the U. S. would look favorably upon a successful coup.

h. Vietnam has progressed faster in material things than it has spiritually. The people have more possessions but are starting to lose the will to protect their liberty. There is a big lesson here to be learned about the U.S. aid program which needs some most serious study.

### Recommendations

Before I left Saigon, I discussed my impressions with Ambassador Durbrow who was most gracious towards me during the visit. Included in these impressions was my feeling that many of the Americans in Saigon perhaps subconsciously believed in defeat, probably had spent too much time and energy on the political situation in Saigon instead of on the very real Viet Cong menace, and were in need of some bolstering up by the Chief of Mission. In this feeling of defeat, I would have to except the Chief of MAAG and the local CIA Chief who believe we can win. Ambassador Durbrow told me of the memo he had issued to all Americans in Saigon after the 11 November coup attempt. I said this was a good move, but much more than writing a paper was needed.

He asked me what suggestions I had. I said that I didn't have much immediately and would have to do a lot of thinking about it. The situation in Vietnam is not black and white, but a most complex one in all shades of gray. Many Americans and Vietnamese expected me to come up with some sort of a miracle, to turn Ngo Dinh Diem into an Americanized modern version of the ancient Vietnamese leader Le Loi. However, the task requires more than a gimmick or some simple answer. It will take a lot of hard work and follow-through. In 12 days, all I could do was learn as much as I could and to "plant a seed or two" with Ngo Dinh Diem and other Vietnamese leaders who know that I speak out of deep affection for the free Vietnamese.

Since leaving Vietnam, I have spent many hours thinking about the situation there. I am far from having a complete proposal to solve the situation. However, I do have some recommendations now for steps which should be taken to start remedying the downhill and dangerous trend in Vietnam. They are:

a. The U. S. should recognize that Vietnam is in a critical condition and should treat it as a combat area of the cold war, as an area requiring emergency treatment.

b. When there is an emergency, the wise thing to do is to pick the best people you have, people who are experienced in dealing with this precise type of emergency, and send them to the spot with orders to remedy the situation. When you get the people in position and free them to work, you should then back them up in every practical way you can. The real decisions will be made in little daily actions in Vietnam, not in Washington. That's why the best are needed on the spot.

c. Our U.S. team in Vietnam should have a hard core of experienced Americans who know and really like Asia and the Asians, dedicated people who are willing to risk their lives for the ideals of freedom, and who will try to influence and guide the Vietnamese towards U.S. policy objectives with the warm friendships and affection which our close alliance deserves. We should break the rules of personnel assignment, if necessary, to get such U.S. military and civilians to Vietnam.

d. Under emergency conditions, our aid to Vietnam should be treated as contingency business and be given expedited priority handling until we can afford to take a breathing spell.

e. Ambassador Durbrow should be transferred in the immediate future. He has been in the "forest of tigers" which is Vietnam for nearly four years now and I doubt that he himself realizes how tired he has become or how close he is to individual trees in this big woods. Correctly or not, the recognized government of Vietnam does not look upon him as a friend, believing that he sympathized strongly with the coup leaders of 11 November.

f. The new Ambassador should arrive as many weeks as possible before the April elections, for which the Communists are now actively preparing with their "political struggle" tactics almost unhindered. The new Ambassador should be a person with marked leadership talents who can make the Country Team function harmoniously and spiritually, who



can influence Asians through understanding them sympathetically, and who is alert to the power of the Mao Tse Tung tactics now being employed to capture Vietnam and who is dedicated to feasible and practical democratic means to defeat these Communist tactics.

g. Serious consideration should be given to replacing USOM Chief Gardiner. A number of Vietnamese pointedly answered my questions about Gardiner by talking about his deputy, Coster, while admitting that "Gardiner seems to be a nice man who has fallen asleep in our climate."

h. U.S. military men in Vietnam should be freed to work in the combat areas. Our MAAG has a far greater potential than is now being utilized. U.S. military men are hardly in a position to be listened to when they are snug in rear areas and give advice to Vietnamese officers who have attended the same U.S. military schools and who are now in a combat in which few Americans are experienced. MAAG personnel from General McGarr on down expressed desire to get more into real field work; let's give them what they want as far as U.S. permission is concerned and let them earn their way into positions of greater influence with the Vietnamese military in the field.

i. A mature American, with much the same qualifications as those given above for the selection of the next Ambassador, should be assigned to Vietnam for political operations which will start creating a Vietnamese-style foundation for more democratic government without weakening the strong leadership required to bring about the defeat of the Communists. This must not be a "clever" type who is out to gain a reputation as a "manipulator" or a word-smith who is more concerned about the way his reports will look in Washington than in implementing U.S. policy in Vietnam.

j. We must support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive can replace him legally. President Diem feels that Americans have attacked him almost as viciously as the Communists, and he has withdrawn into a shell for self-protection. We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again.

K. We must do much, much more constructive work with the oppositionists. I suspect that the U.S. has taught them to be carping critics and disloyal citizens by our encouragement of these traits. They need to put together a constructive program which can save

Vietnam from the Communists by building something worth a man's life to preserve. If it's a good program, we should encourage one strong political opposition to emerge, without endangering the national security. Here is where our political skill needs to be used. This political work is needed as a matter of grave urgency. Unless a constructive outlet is found quickly, the opposition in Saigon is going to explode in violence again and the Viet Cong are wide awake to exploit it this time.

### The Communist Threat.

It was a shock to me to look over maps of the estimated situation with U.S. and Vietnamese intelligence personnel, as well as with President Diem who held similar grim views. The Communist Viet Cong now dominate much of the 1st and 5th Military Regions, as well as being active in spots in other regions, according to these estimates. The probable strength of the Communist armed forces in South Vietnam was given to me in various guesses from 3,000 to 15,000. My guess is that the strength is now closer to the latter figure and that only Hanoi knows accurately.

This strength estimate by itself isn't what shocked me. The shocking part was to realize that the thousands of disciplined and trained Communist graduates of "proletarian military science" had been able to infiltrate the most productive area of South Vietnam and to gain control of nearly all of it except for narrow corridors protected by military actions and for a few highly-localized spots where loyal paramilitary forces (Civil Guards and Self-Defense Corps) have undertaken inspired counter-guerrilla actions or where villagers work closely with the military.

The Viet Cong have the initiative and most of the control over the region from the jungled foothills of the High Plateau north of Saigon all the way south down to the Gulf of Siam, excluding the big city area of Saigon-Cholon. This is Vietnam's "bread-basket" where most of its rice and rubber are grown.

Unlike the Philippines or Malaya, the Communists cannot be cordoned off at the country's borders and then dealt with as an internal security problem alone. The borders of Vietnam are long and include some of the most difficult terrain in the world to patrol. It is apparent that many of the Viet Cong infiltrate from Cambodia, particularly from Svayrieng Province. Also, southeastern Laos has a reported Communist



build-up, with RLG forces committed elsewhere, and increasing infiltration into Vietnam is reported.

There is an intense psychological attack being waged against Free Vietnam by the Communists. This not only includes an almost constant barrage from powerful Radio Hanoi, which is reportedly relayed from Cambodia and is received as a loud and clear signal in South Vietnam, but also a heavy campaign by on-the-spot agitprop agents. A part of the psychological attack is directed against Americans, particularly against U.S. MAAG personnel, along the lines of the Chinese Communist "hate America" campaign. I did not have the time or means to assess the effect of this psychological attack which has been going on for years.

The big city area of Saigon-Cholon undoubtedly is a target of Communist operations, although I was able to find out little about either the Communist organization or its operations in this city area. U.S. intelligence personnel believed that Vietnamese counter-intelligence organizations were so actively "hustling" so many suspects that the Communists have been unable to institute much of an organization. President Diem believed that the Communists were concentrating their work elsewhere, following the dictum: "first the mountains, then the countryside, and then the city." The attitude of Vietnamese and U.S. officials reminded me of the French and Vietnamese officials in Hanoi in 1953-54, who were so surprised later to discover that a complete, block-by-block clandestine Communist apparatus existed there. Or, of Filipinos and Americans who believed the Huks were in central Luzon in 1950 and were so surprised when an entire Communist politburo was captured in the city of Manila. I believe that the people in Saigon-Cholon have been the target of considerable subversive effort by the Communists and that it takes an in-place organization to carry this out.

Communist strength figures are difficult to determine due in part to the different categories of personnel. I was able to get no estimate on the number of Communist political-psychological operators, although the DRV reportedly have trained many for work in the south. Also, the Communist military personnel include regulars who have infiltrated from the north, plus territorial forces and guerrillas who apparently are recruited locally. Colonel Tranh Thien Khiem, who commands the 5th Military Region, broke his estimate of some 7,000 Viet Cong military in his region into 3,320 regulars, 1,170 territorials, and 2,590 guerrillas. When the Vietminh troops were transferred to the north in 1954-55 under the Geneva Agreement, many left families.

behind in the south, along with stay-behind organizations and arms caches. Although the pacification campaigns of 1955-56 cleaned up what the Communists had left behind to some extent, there were remnants remaining which the Viet Cong have since exploited and augmented greatly over the past 5 years.

### President Ngo Dinh Diem

President Diem and I are friends. Also, he is a man who put other Vietnamese friends of mine in jail or exiled them. It is hardly a blind friendship.

Prior to my departure from Washington, Jeff Parsons asked if I would please size-up President Diem carefully to see if he had changed much from when I had worked with him so closely in 1954-56. In our first meeting, he was a bit cautious with me. I suspected that he was waiting for me to drop Washington's other shoe as a follow-up to the Ambassador's demands that he reform his ways. So, I reminisced on what we had been through together in the past and he joined in, adding the story of the 11 November coup as he saw it. Our meetings from then on became more like the old days, with plenty of give and take. . . but only after I convinced him that I still had affection for the Vietnamese people and was trying to understand their problems before sounding off.

He seems to have a better grasp of economic matters than formerly. Also, I believe he sincerely wants to pass some of his daily burden of work to others. He said that he had found this extremely hard to do, since too many others were soft in carrying out responsibilities or else were too vain to knuckle-down to hard work. This has forced him to over-burden Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency, who doesn't hesitate to make tough decisions when needed, who has had to act as hatchet-man when others were too soft to get rid of incompetents, and who has been loyal to his boss (although he speaks right up for his own views). Vice President Tho is so soft-hearted that he really never takes corrective action against wrong doers. Vu Van Thai is a "blackmailer" by threatening to resign after convincing the Americans that he is the most brilliant Vietnamese in economic matters, although he is a poor executive whose work is in bad shape; if Diem accepted Thai's resignation, the Americans would feel that the Vietnamese Government was going to hell. (Unfortunately, there's some truth in these feelings of Diem's about Tho and Thai).



I believe President Diem is more screened in by his "palace guard" than he realizes - - but then much the same could be said of other leaders elsewhere. I noted that he still has a personal informant net and I managed to talk to some of them privately. The largest influence, but not the only one, is wielded by his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. However, I found President Diem unusually well informed on the situation in Vietnam, including the bad aspects - - better informed than any other Vietnamese among the many with whom I talked.

In reflecting on our conversations, I have concluded that most folks who talk to him have little empathy for, or sensitive understanding of, him. They fail to realize that Diem is human and doesn't like the idea of people trying to kill him out of hatred; the coup attempt of 11 November opened at 3 a.m. by bursts of heavy machine gun fire into his bedroom in an obvious try at liquidating him in his bed. On top of this, he has now had nearly 7 years of venomous attack by the Communists who know that he is a major obstacle which must be destroyed before they can win. This is a daily psychological attack on him in his own country, in his own language, and listened to by his own people. The only way he could shut this off today would be to give up what he, and we, believe in. On top of this, he has criticism heaped on him by many who are simply being destructive, he has administrators who are disloyal or whose vanity is expressed in talking a better job of work than in doing it. And then, to cap the criticisms, he feels that many Americans have contempt for him - - that the U.S. which should be Vietnam's staunchest friend is somehow taking the same psychological line with him as do the Communists, that somehow our nobly-expressed policies get carried out with much pettiness in actual practice.

If the next American official to talk to President Diem would have the good sense to see him as a human being who has been through a lot of hell for years -- and not as an opponent to be beaten to his knees -- we would start regaining our influence with him in a healthy way. Whatever else we might think of him, he has been unselfish in devoting his life to his country and has little in personal belongings to show for it. If we don't like the heavy influence of Brother Nhu, then let's move someone of ours in close. This someone, however, must be able to look at problems with understanding, suggest better solutions than does Nhu, earn a position of influence.

The next time we become "holier than thou", we might find it interesting to reflect on the DRV. Do the Soviets and the Chinese Communists give Ho Chi Minh a similar hard time, or do they aid and abet him?

## U. S. Political Efforts

The United States has been the main foreign political mentor for Free Vietnam since it became an independent nation. Of course other nations have had their influence. But we were the ones who have spoken with authority, who have held the purse-strings, who trained and advised the government personnel, and to whom most Vietnamese in political life have looked for guidance. It is only human to want to find someone else to blame for what has gone wrong. But, we won't be able to start doing effective political work until we admit that our own actions carry responsibilities with them. There are plenty of Aaron Burr's, a few Alexander Hamilton's and practically no George Washington's, Tom Jefferson's or Tom Paine's in Saigon today . . . largely as a result of our U.S. political influence. This certainly is not the U.S. policy we had hoped to implement.

Ambassador Durbrow seemed genuinely surprised when I told him that the Can Lao Party in Vietnam was originally promoted by the U.S. State Department and was largely the brain-child of a highly-respected, senior U.S. Foreign Service professional. Several weeks after this action was undertaken originally, I learned of it and warned that the benefits were extremely short-term and that great lasting harm could result by a favored party forcing older parties to go underground. However, the decision had been made, the Can Lao party had been started, and we had to start working from that reality. We cannot go back to living in the past and must keep moving ahead, but that doesn't mean that we have to pay forever for our mistakes.

However, the real point is that we don't seem to have very long memories or enough solid feeling of responsibility for our acts. Many U.S. Foreign Service officials leap into attacks on the Can Lao Party. I agree with their reasons. Any thinking American would. But I sure would feel better about it if they could only remember the consequences of their own actions for a few short years - and learn from that memory. I cannot truly sympathize with Americans who help promote a fascistic state and then get angry when it doesn't act like a democracy.

So, what should we do about it? I have a concrete recommendation. We need an American in Saigon who can work with real skill, with great sensitivity to Vietnamese feelings, and with a fine sense of the dangerous limits of Vietnamese national security in a time of emergency. This unusual American should be given the task of creating



an opposition party which would coalesce the majority of the opposition into one organization, of helping this new party adopt a platform which contains sound ideas for building national entities which the Vietnamese people would find worth defending against the Communists, and of strongly influencing it to play the role of loyal opposition while President Diem is in power and the nation is in such great danger.

This work with the opposition is a matter of grave urgency. Unless the energies of the malcontents, the frustrated, the patriots on the outs are quickly channeled into constructive political works, they are going to explode into destructive political work. This opposition situation in Saigon-Cholon is at the bursting point, and there is no safety valve. When it next blows, and if Diem cannot cope with it, the Saigon political scene has all the makings of turning into anarchy. It can happen, and soon.

I saw a number of opposition people, officials of various parties, members of the National Assembly, and disgruntled members of President Diem's administration. They eagerly told me how they were criticizing Diem's actions more and more openly. I asked them what their own program was, other than to seize power for themselves or to have me pat them on the head for being critics. Few of them had any sensible ideas. I told them they'd better get busy scratching for a better program themselves or else I could only assume that they were being disloyal or treasonous in a time of great national danger. I trust that other Americans talking to these oppositionists will do the same or we will be inviting disaster by listening to this and keeping mum when we should be working like beavers to turn it into constructive channels.

If we can get most of the oppositionists meeting with each other to try to put together a platform they can all agree on, and can protect such work so that it can be done fairly openly, we will have an extremely useful political action in motion. It will absorb months of political energies which otherwise will go towards the solution of armed overthrow. A major opposition party, once it starts becoming a reality, will tend to make the several governmental groupings such as the Can Lao, MNR, and Nhu's labor organizations start coalescing into one stronger group. In this way, we can help promote a two-party system which can afford to be surfaced, end much of the present clandestine political structures, and give sound encouragement to the development of new political leaders. There are many fine younger patriots who need this sort of a healthy political atmosphere to develop in, if we ever expect Vietnam to have a real future.

## Comments

Here are some additional thoughts:

a. President Diem said that if it hadn't been for the dedicated anti-communism of about a million Catholics, Vietnam could never have kept going this long. Yet his brother, Archbishop Thuc, told me that the refugees from the north (including many Catholics) had been settled into such remunerative new lives in the south that they had gone soft, no longer wanted to fight, and criticized the government for wanting to continue the war. Also, the Saigon-Cholon area is seething with political discontent while the people are far better off in material possessions than ever before. The shops are full of goods for Tet and the people are buying heavily. Somehow, the U. S. has filled their bellies but has neglected their spirit.

b. Many of the Vietnamese in the countryside who were right up against the Viet Cong terror were full of patriotic spirit. Those who seemed to be in the hardest circumstances, fighting barefoot and with makeshift weapons, had the highest morale. They still can lick the Viet Cong with a little help. There's a lesson here on our giving aid. Maybe we should learn that our funds cannot buy friends or a patriotic spirit by mere materialistic giving. Perhaps we should help those who help themselves, and not have a lot of strings on that help.

c. The Viet Cong crowded a lot of action into the year 1960. They infiltrated thousands of armed forces into South Vietnam, recruited local levies of military territorials and guerrillas, and undertook large scale guerrilla and terroristic operations. In so doing, they neglected doing sound political work at the grass roots level and broke one of Mao Tse Tung's cardinal rules. Many people in the south now under their thumb are unhappy about it, but too terrified to act against these new rulers. The Viet Cong apparently have been working hard recently to rectify this error, and now have political cadres in the field. We still have a chance of beating them if we can give the people some fighting chance of gaining security and some political basis of action. Since both of these actions will have to be carried out by Vietnamese forces in their Defense establishment, it is worthwhile to make U.S. help to the Vietnamese in the contested provinces along these sorely needed lines a priority mission of the U.S. military in Vietnam. The political actions should be the implementing of Vietnamese governmental policy by Vietnamese



force commanders, aided by Vietnamese psychological warfare units. If the U.S. military doesn't ride herd on this, it is apt to be neglected and is too vital to keeping Vietnam free to be made a secondary work.

d. I am passing a copy of this to Admiral Felt at CINCPAC.. Suggest that copies be passed also to selected persons in Defense, State, and CIA.

*E G Lansdale*

Edward G. LANSDALE  
Brigadier General, U.S.A.F.

General Lansdale seems on sound ground in arguing that continued nagging, let alone stronger pressures, to win Diem's acceptance of political changes he did not want and which he regarded as specific threats to his regime, could only subtract from Diem's confidence in the U.S. This in turn imperiled hopes of winning his cooperation on military measures believed crucial to security. Nevertheless, the State Department endorsed the Ambassador's notions for continued representations to Diem on the urgency of political reforms, and instructed him to follow up his 14 October demarche on the liberalization of his regime. In his approach to Diem, the Department suggested the Ambassador follow the line:

" . . . Would prefer, for moment, put aside questions internal reforms GVN calculated primarily increase its efficiency (such as Internal Security Council) and focus on liberalization since any announcements GVN makes this subject will be matter great public interest . . . " (Underlining added)

" . . . It Embassy's observation events November 11 and 12, whatever their cause, have led to increased atmosphere uneasiness and some doubt projected reforms will be adequate (Embtel 1151). This adds emphasis to basic premise against which, we believe, program of liberalization should be tested: it should be genuine, if limited, liberalization on several fronts to be announced simultaneously . . . if liberalization not clear cut and genuine and not made on several fronts, public will feel deceived and GVN will lose rather than gain popular support . . . " (Deptel 898 to AmEmbassy Saigon, 15 December 1960, pp. 1-2)

The Department picked out several "liberalization" measures from the 14 October demarche, including the right of the National Assembly to investigate the GVN; greater freedom for domestic press; better relations with the foreign press; and several rural measures.

Durbrow reported on the resulting conversation with Diem:

" . . . While Diem was pleasant during hour and three-quarters of discussions, he was basically negative. Diem did not reply to my remarks immediately but insisted essential have additional 20,000 troops since would do no good to try to put in reforms, build factories, roads and bridges, etc., unless these things and people could be protected. He referred several times to the need for 20,000 men stressing need because of deteriorating Lao situation. I then remarked we had just learned that he had increased force level of civil guard to 64,000 and asked if this increase would not fill security force needs.



Diem replied civil guard not trained so needs bring back 20,000 reservists. He asked that I urge Dept to give favorable consideration force level request and I reiterated matter under careful study in Washington . . . " (Saigon 1216 to SecState, December 24, 1960, pp. 1-2)

When the Ambassador told Diem of approval to give him eleven H-34 helicopters as soon as possible, "he made no comment." He rejected notions that the Assembly might investigate executive departments (dismissing Durbrow's comment that we have the same system in America) and then commented on the Department's earlier recommendations with respect to the agrovillage program:

" . . . Although I had not mentioned corvee labor this time, Diem stated this only way collect equivalent of taxes from peasants and that this system is in Vietnamese tradition, but peasants in Cochín-China under French had not been asked to contribute labor. Therefore they now resent corvee labor and of course would not think of paying any monetary taxes. He pointed out peasants in central Viet-Nam willingly contribute free labor instead of taxes. I remarked one reason for discontent in south is arbitrary action of officials and the failure to explain needs to peasants before forcing them to work. Diem insisted peasants had been told of needs but they just lazy." (Ibid., p. 3)

In view of Diem's expressed attitudes in this area, and the actual practice of his regime in implementing the agrovillage program, there was scarcely a basis for surprise when U.S.-urged provisions for paying peasants for their labor on the strategic hamlets went generally unfulfilled. In any event, Durbrow's report left little doubt that persuasion in pursuit of liberalizing reforms that Durbrow and State -- but not Diem, or, it would appear, MAAG or the DOD -- believed essential to counter the Viet Cong, had reached an impasse:

"On few occasions he let me talk, I urged he adopt reforms soonest since it essential to win further support of the people if Viet Cong menace is to be overcome, but he gave me no indication of reforms he may adopt. Before leaving I again expressed hope that he would accept our suggestion that he announce all liberalizing programs at one time in order to make best impact. Diem replied he would think about this but made no commitment.

"Comments. We have heard that Nhu, Thuan and others have been running into resistance when urging Diem to adopt worthwhile reforms. I also received impression he very reluctant to adopt reforms and is still basically thinking in terms of force to save the day, hence his insistence several times that

we approve force level increase and his action raising civil guard ceiling by 10,000. While I still believe it absolutely essential he adopt more liberal programs, it is not certain from his attitude and remarks that he will take effective action in these matters, although I learned later he has agreed to engage the services of a public relations expert suggested by CAS to make a survey of GVN foreign public relations needs." (Ibid., pp. 3-4)

#### 4. The Counterinsurgency Plan (CIP)

The expectations of the Department of Defense for the amelioration of Diem's security situation, as well as those of State and the Embassy, were embodied in a Counterinsurgency Plan for Vietnam (CIP), prepared over the months April to December 1960, and forwarded to Washington for approval on 4 January 1961 (Saigon despatch 276, date cited). The CIP represented a considerable evolution in the U.S. concepts of how to cope with Vietnam's internal security. During 1959 and early 1960, Diem, recognizing the precariousness of his position, had begun to experiment with the structure of his security forces, seeking to find a mix of police, paramilitary, and regular military forces capable of countering the Viet Cong. The U.S. MAAG, Vietnam, though constantly handicapped by personnel ceilings imposed out of respect for the Geneva Accords, had labored to build a modern national army, capable of both delaying invading forces from North Vietnam and of coping with internal threats; in the pre-1960 MAAG view, Diem was trifling with his army. \* In early 1960 the US decided,

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\* The MAAG "Country Statements" for the period 1956-1960 record a concentration on developing the staff and logistic superstructure of ARVN, and on U.S. Army-type training programs; throughout, it is clear that the MAAG looked increasingly to the Self Defense Corps, the Civil Guard, and the National Police to meet the "Viet Minh" internal threat in order to free ARVN for conventional combat training. See especially U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, "Country Statement on MDAP, Non-NATO Countries," paragraphs 1, 5, 6, and Section C, of the reports 15 January 1956, 20 July 1956, 21 January 1957, 15 July 1957; also, same headquarters, "Narrative Study," dated 24 August 1958, and "Narrative Statement," dated 25 November 1958 with changes dated 10 May 1959, 9 August 1959, and 8 November 1959. Cf., Shaplen, op. cit., 117-119, 137; Warner, op. cit., 129-136; Scigliano, op. cit., 162-167; Nighswonger, op. cit., 43-48; David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire (New York: Random House, 1965), 60-66.



Geneva and the ICC notwithstanding, to amalgamate the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) with the MAAG; action was initiated to obtain ICC concurrence. Early in May the press learned of this plan, and a story was published that "the US is doubling its military training staff in South Vietnam and stepping up the training of Vietnamese troops for guerrilla warfare against Communist terrorists:" The release stated that:

"The decision reflects concern about the mounting strength and boldness of Communist bands which are raiding the villages and assassinating Vietnamese officials. However, US military and diplomatic officials said the Communist campaign is not a 'crisis' and in itself, is not likely to become a major threat to the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Guerrilla warfare specialists will be included among the 350 additional military trainee officers and men sent to Vietnam."

On 5 May 1960, the day this story was released, Senator Mansfield wrote a letter to General Williams in Saigon quoting the press dispatch, and asking the General to explain:

"I do not mind telling you that I was personally very impressed with that portion of your testimony which suggested to me that you were directing the military aid program in a fashion which was, wisely, aimed at working MAAG 'out of a job' and that you had about reached the point where the scaling down could begin. Therefore, it came as something of a surprise to me to learn...that we intend to double the training staff of MAAG in Vietnam by adding to it 350 men."

General Williams' reply (MAAG Saigon, telegram to OSD/ISA, MAGCH-CH691, of 200711Z, May 1960) informed the Senator of the MAAG-TERM merger, but went on to say:

"It is my personal opinion MAAG should and can work itself 'out of job' with possible reduction approximately 15% in June 1961 and approximately 20% reduction yearly thereafter. Depending of course on readings taken at subsequent dates."

General Williams' ideas, however, were not integrated into the CIP. He left Saigon prior to the completion of the plan, and in any event the mounting intensity of the internal war precluded any further consideration of "phased withdrawal" before 1962.

a. General McGarr Replaces General Williams

A study prepared at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, \* dated 10 June 1960, noted that:

"From a loose conglomeration of combat battalions and various supporting units under French command in 1954, and under the aegis of, and with the impetus furnished by the U.S. MAAG, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces have evolved into a balanced defense force. This force consists of 3 corps, with 7 infantry divisions (tailored to meet the existing situation in Vietnam, rather than 'mirroring' U.S. or other divisions) and supporting arms and services, together with small but appropriate naval and air forces . . . These total forces have the mission of (1) maintaining internal security (eventually to become the primary mission of the civil guard and other civil security forces when these organizations reach a satisfactory state of organization, training and equipment, at which time the armed forces will become the 'back-up' force), and (2) providing limited initial resistance to attack from Communist North Vietnam . . . The President [Dien] continues to organize military units outside the aegis, and contrary to the advice, of the U.S. MAAG. These non-U.S.-supported units are of questionable value and tend to drain the best people away from U.S.-supported units. Also, they may result in a requirement for U.S. support, not previously programmed."

The same study noted as a major deficiency the unwieldy high command of the RVNAF:

"An example of complicated and duplicating channels of command is where a division commander receives orders from both the corps commander (who should be his undisputed boss) and the region commander in whose region his division is stationed. Another example is where the President, by means of his SCR-399 Radio Net (NCS in a radio van in the garden of the presidential office) sends operational orders to a regiment direct, bypassing the Department of National Defense, the General Staff, the field commander, the corps, and the division. Still another example is where a chief of an arm gives orders to a unit of that arm, the unit being at the time assigned to a corps."

The study quoted above was produced at the behest of Major General Lionel C. McGarr, who was at the time the Commandant at Leavenworth,

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\* "Study on Army Aspects of the Military Assistance Program in Vietnam (U)," 10 June 1960.



but programmed to become Chief, MAAG, Vietnam, in September 1960. General McGarr was informed by this study, and by his other preparations for his new assignment, of the increasing concern in Washington about the military situation in Vietnam.

On 24 March 1960, the Chief of Staff of the Army had called for urgent measures to improve the counter guerrilla capabilities of RVNAF.\* On 30 March 1960, the JCS advised CINCPAC (telegram JCS 974802, date cited) that:

"The JCS agree that anti-guerrilla capability should be developed within organization of the regular armed forces by changing emphasis in training selected elements ARVN and other forces from conventional to anti-guerrilla warfare."

On 27 April 1960, CINCPAC submitted a study on counterinsurgency in South Vietnam to the JCS. On 6 June, JCS forwarded this study to the Secretary of Defense, recommending his acting to obtain U.S. Government support of counterinsurgency operations.\*\* The initial recommendation was followed by a proposed outline plan. The Secretary of Defense obtained the necessary concurrence in Washington, and on 20 October CINCPAC and Ambassador Durbrow were directed to develop the detailed plan and submit it to Washington (Joint State-DOD Message 192020Z October 1960).

In the meantime, Chief, MAAG, with the assistance of additional U.S. Army Special Forces, began in June a new training program for RVNAF designed to improve its counter guerrilla capabilities. Also, in September by SM-906-60 (15 September 1960), the Joint Chiefs of Staff had instructed subordinate commanders to take steps to improve guerrilla and counter guerrilla warfare training. In early 1961, the Director of the Joint Staff, Lt. General Earle G. Wheeler (DJS-158-61, 9 February 1961) circulated a paper prepared by General McGarr to improve that training in Vietnam. The paper, entitled "Information, Guidance and Instructions to MAAG Advisory Personnel by Lt. General Lionel C. McGarr, November 10, 1960," called for the training of RVNAF to produce the "anti-guerrilla guerrilla." General McGarr pointed out that the guerrilla derived his principal strength from conventional opponents, and that he had to be defeated in his own chosen form of combat:

"There is only one way he can survive -- capitalize on the conventional concept by taking advantage of the inherent

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\* U.S. Army, Office Chief of Military History, "United States Policy Toward Vietnam Since 1945," Chronology.

\*\* CINCPAC, Command History for 1960, 143-144.

weakness of its built-in inflexibility and the longer reaction time required for its conventional type action -- and yes, even its conventional type thinking! Thinking which is too often geared to highly sophisticated weapons systems, complex logistics, stylized or rigid tactics, and vulnerable lines of communications. . . . "

"Thus, from the purely military point of view, the solution hinges on the capability of the armed forces to protect the very lives of the people - to include government functionaries, from mounting communist assassination and intimidation. In the far-flung villages, especially those isolated from governmental protective power in point of time, space and force, this is most difficult. The guerrilla, because of mobility and a battle-tested plan, together with the unique situation here, has been able to seize the initiative by taking the military offensive. This is because all of the elements of national power have not been adequately coordinated in the past. The government of the armed forces are literally blind due to a lack of information on VC guerrilla actions and intentions. As indicated previously, the military particularly must have adequate, evaluated, collated military intelligence if it is to be able to best apply its present force. To the military man - especially the commander of a small military group defending his country against the VC guerrillas in the swamps or jungles - timely, accurate, evaluated intelligence - not false rumor - spells the difference between success or defeat - life or death. With both the present military and political situation a matter for serious concern, it appears logical that the time has come when the armed forces must have the necessary force to give the population full and complete physical protection from the VC. Because of various reasons - some within and some beyond the immediate control of the Government of Vietnam - this cannot be done to the required degree at present. . . .

"Now, let us examine the broad objective of the MAAG in South Vietnam. As advisors, you must not only advise but follow through! Therefore, you must clearly understand that proper advising requires an instructor-pupil relationship with explanation, illustration and close personal supervision. It is not enough to tell your counterparts what to do and stop there. Your government prohibits your accompanying troops on wartime operations, but this does not lessen - only adds to - your advisory mission. Also, it is most important you understand that even as you cannot make a 'template type solution' of conventional concepts work on varied terrain, the same is true of solutions based on unconventional concepts. . . . Objective, creative-type



thinking is required here. Our thinking must be beamed towards evolving a new concept of action - a synthesis of the useable portions of history, the closely coordinated military and political concepts of our enemy, and the application of both conventional and unconventional warfare. All of these welded together by proper application of the principles - which will still remain valid - must be employed in the operations of our hunter-killer teams of 'antiguerrilla guerrillas.' For we must find a better way but only to counter the Viet Cong guerrilla in the swamps, the canal-gridded, inundated Mekong River delta, and the rugged mountains and jungles of both the high plateau and the entire land border region - but to crush him! . . .

" . . . Militarily, our problem appears two-fold: First, reduce or eliminate VC intervention from outside. Second, prevent the growth and possible final complete military success of VC military action, while awaiting solution of the political 'causes'. This VC military success can happen here - it is our job to prevent it. At present, better use of military resources is Vietnam's only readily available solution - and it is at best a marginal one.

"And finally, as a basis for your analysis, remember that the conventional organizations such as corps, divisions and regiments can be very adaptable to antiguerrilla operations. . . .

"I feel we should now reemphasize the basic actions and recommendations already implemented by this MAAG to assure a better RVNAF capability in fighting VC internal subversion by setting up the framework of a more responsive organization and command procedure. These actions included the following:

a. MAAG recommended the transfer of the Civil Guard (CG) from the Department of Interior to the Department of Defense for equipping, training and operational control with command vested in RVNAF. . . .

b. MAAG recommended to the RVNAF and the GVN that the overall RVNAF command structure be modified to give clear lines of military control for all military type operations. . . .

c. MAAG recommended a rotation plan which would re-establish tactical unity and integrity of units, give military commanders responsibility for pacification of a permanently assigned area, and allow for rotation within division or even possibly regimental size units - as a minimum.

d. MAAG recommended that the present unnecessary duplication of the high level personnel in Corps and Military Region Headquarters be eliminated or corrected. . . .

" . . . As explained previously, this concept envisions the organization and detailing of specialized ARVN units as 'anti-guerrilla guerrillas' employing improved guerrilla tactics against the VC guerrilla. They could well dress in guerrilla type clothing and would take the field in their assigned areas within the divisional zones for a period of one to six months, operating in the swamps, mountains and jungles as does their quarry - the guerrilla. These hunter-killer teams must be strongly disciplined, well indoctrinated, highly motivated, and imbued with the spirit of the offensive - and they must be offensively trained and led. They must have the will and determination to close with and destroy the VC.

"Our objective must be to find, fix, fight and finish the enemy! No half measures will do. Time is our most precious commodity and the urgency of the situation requires that we use every second gainfully. This leaves no place for complacency on your part - or a business-as-usual attitude. MAAG cannot afford the luxury of an eight hour day or a five day week - neither can RVNAF. History will not wait."

General McGarr's impress was on the Counterinsurgency Plan (CIP), which reached Washington in January 1961, just before John F. Kennedy took office.

b. Content of the CIP

The CIP consisted of a basic directive and three annexes dealing with RVNAF force increases, concept of operations, and logistics, respectively. It incorporated one major point of difference between Ambassador Durbrow and General McGarr -- the RVNAF force increases (Despatch 276):

Ambassador Durbrow:

I maintain reservations concerning the proposal to increase the force level up to 20,000 additional RVNAF troops, purely to meet the threat in Viet-Nam and still believe more calculated risks should be taken by using more of the forces in being to meet the immediate and serious guerrilla terrorist threat. I recognize, however, that additional well-trained forces in being in this area are probably now justified from purely U.S. interest point of view in order to meet growing bloc threat SEA represented by Soviet airlift in Laos.



MAAG Comments:

The military requirement for this force increase to accomplish the current mission had been demonstrated in MAAG considered opinion as early as August 1960. This force increase was badly needed before the beginning of the Soviet airlift in Laos. The recent Viet Minh overt aggression against Laos merely reinforces this requirement.

The four divisions in the North in I and II Corps Areas are committed in anti-guerrilla and static guard duty to the extent which not only cuts down on their ability to resist overt attack, and thus magnifies the risk to a militarily unacceptable degree, but also prohibits required training to adequately counter either external or internal aggression.

But otherwise, the CIP represented agreement on what the problem was in Vietnam, and what steps were necessary to solve it:

"I. SITUATION . . .

Developments in South Viet-Nam over the past year indicate a trend that is adverse to the stability and effectiveness of President Diem's government. Beginning in December 1959 and continuing to the present, there has been a mounting increase throughout South Vietnam of Viet Cong terrorist activities and guerrilla warfare. . . .

Politically, discontent with the Diem Government has been prevalent for some time among intellectuals and elite circles and has been rising among the peasantry and, to some extent, labor and urban business groups. Criticism of these elements focuses on Ngo family rule, especially the roles of the President's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Madame Nhu and the influence of the clandestine Can Lao political apparatus of the regime. An even more important element in the political situation is the criticism of the President's leadership within government circles, including the official bureaucracy and the military. In the past, such discontent and criticism had been centered on Diem's brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, as directors of the allegedly corrupt Can Lao Party.

Further aggravating many of the government's problems is the active and partly successful campaign of the Viet Cong to discredit President Diem and weaken the government's authority through political subversion, as well as through military action. Among other factors making this possible is

the void between the GVN and its people which stems from the failure of the GVN to communicate understandably with the population [sic] and, in reverse, the lack of an effective mechanism whereby the people can in their terms communicate with the GVN. Taking advantage of this lack of effective communication and the GVN's inability to protect the people the Viet Cong has had considerable success in sowing disaffection and disrupting effective administration of the government among the population. This is especially true in the Capital, 1st and 5th Military Regions. Viet Cong successes in these regions are due to the large number among the population who, whether out of terror or sympathy, give support to the Viet Cong. Aided by this situation, the Viet Cong is striving to establish a political apparatus parallel to the GVN. Below province level in the 5th Military Region, no effective GVN control exists in many areas. The Viet Cong are increasing the void by taxation, terroristic acts, attacks on Self Defense posts, assassination of village and provincial officials, and simultaneously a systematic development of the Viet Cong political apparatus to fill the void. In view of the above conditions the principal task facing the GVN is restoration of individual security. . . .

Military force, in the form of increased communist insurgency, is clearly the major immediate threat to the stability of Viet-Nam today. South Viet-Nam is unique in that it is the only country in the world which is forced to defend itself against a communist internal subversion action, while at the same time being subject to the militarily supportable threat of a conventional external attack from communist North Viet-Nam. The RVNAF force basis is inadequate to meet both these threats.

"The problem is twofold, although at present the counter-insurgency phase is the more dangerous and immediate. In this counterinsurgency fight RVNAF is on the defensive. Approximately 75% of ARVN is committed to pacification missions, about half of these being committed to static guard and security roles. The military chain of command has usually been violated at the expense of unity of effort and command. No adequate operations control or overall planning system presently exists, although significant progress has been made in the development of military plans. The President has exercised arbitrary control of operations, by-passing command channels of the JGS and often Corps and Division staff. Resources have been fragmented to provincial control. The above practices appear to have been designed to divide responsibility in order to guard against the possibility of a military coup through placing too much power in the hands of a single subordinate. The guerrilla



problem has become much more serious than the Civil Guard can manage, thereby requiring a disproportionately large RVNAF commitment, which has further resulted in a serious weakening of the RVNAF capability for defense against internal/external [sic] or overt attack in force. Rotation within RVNAF and Civil Guard cannot be accomplished regularly. Many units have been on operations for a year or more without relief, because RVNAF strength is insufficient to permit an adequate rotation policy and to conduct adequate border and coastal surveillance. Many troops are battle weary, in a state of low morale, and in need of recuperation and training. Notwithstanding the above deficiencies, GVN plans have recently been developed for the RVNAF Command Control and Logistic structure which upon implementation, possibly in the near future, should correct major deficiencies if adequate military strength is provided.

"The complete divorce of command control from logistics support in the field has resulted in a lethargic and cumbersome requisitioning and supply system. . . .

"The current military intelligence capability of the RVNAF is inadequate to support the critical intelligence requirements of all echelons of the armed forces. . . .

The economic health of the country, though not robust, has been improving rapidly. In the future, if current economic trends continue and the economy is not further disrupted by adverse security developments, the economy will be able, insofar as physical wealth is concerned, to provide for the consumption needs of a growing population and at the same time to finance a steadily increasing proportion of local military costs and could under favorable conditions meet essentially all these costs. . . .

#### Assumptions:

(1) That the greatest immediate threat to the continued existence of the Republic of Viet-Nam is posed by the steady expansion of guerrilla warfare by the Vietnamese Communists, with the Mekong Delta as a political and military base.

(2) That North Viet-Nam has the capability of supporting guerrilla operations in SVN by infiltrating regular forces and cadres to strengthen locally recruited elements. (Guerrilla forces have increased from 3,500 to an ARVN estimate of 9,800 during 1960.)

(3) That at the present time the Diem Government offers the best hope for defeating the Viet Cong threat.

(4) That the Government of Viet-Nam has the basic potential to cope with the Viet Cong guerrilla threat if necessary corrective measures are taken and adequate forces are provided.

(5) That the gravity of this threat will continue until a maximum offensive and coordinated retaliatory [sic] effort is made by civil and military authorities.

(6) That the most vital consideration of US policy in Viet-Nam is to create governmental stability by the eradication of insurgency in the Republic of Viet-Nam and to that end the activities of all US agencies will be coordinated.

(7) That the Viet Cong, in coordination with the communist parties of Laos and Cambodia, will continue to build up a maximum effort against the Republic of Viet-Nam. The April '61 elections constitute particularly critical period.

(8) That the DRV has a current continuing military capability for external aggression against SVN.

"2. MISSION: Defeat Communist insurgency efforts in SVN.

"3. EXECUTION:

a. Objectives:

(1) GVN must take immediate and extraordinary action to:

(a) Suppress and defeat disruptive Communist activities in South Viet-Nam and concurrently maintain a capability to meet overt aggression.

(b) Establish and maintain political and economic control and stability.

(c) Interdict aid flowing to insurgents across Vietnamese borders, to include both police and military action in coordination with the adjacent nations of Laos and Cambodia.

(2) Country Team:

(a) Induce the GVN to adopt and vigorously prosecute Country Team Plans designed to defeat Communist insurgency.



b. Tasks:

(1) Political:

(a) [Ambassador's reports cited above]. . . In addition to tasks relating to the GVN administration itself, further steps are required in the field of development of independent and quasi-independent political institutions and organizations, such as labor unions, youth movements and political parties. Possible steps in this field are under study by the Country Team.

(2) Security:

(a) Establish an Emergency Operations Control System to include:

1. A national emergency council (GVN established an Internal Security Council 7 October 1960).

2. A director of operations (Permanent secretary for National Defense so designated 7 October 1960) with responsive regional, provincial, district, and village internal security councils.

(b) Implement fully planning aspects of the national planning, programming, and budgeting system.

(c) Develop and employ to optimum RVNAF capabilities to support emergency and related internal security operations on a fully coordinated schedule.

(d) Take extraordinary action starting at highest levels of government and extending to the lowest political subdivision (the village) to establish and maintain internal security.

(e) Assign high priority to the development of intelligence/counterintelligence staff and operational procedure to provide not only timely and accurate knowledge of Viet Cong activities and organization within Viet-Nam, but also provide information to enable the GVN to correct sociological and economic problems which the communists are exploiting.

(f) Develop an adequate border/coastal patrol system.

(g) Develop an adequate communication capability within GVN agencies to support emergency and related internal security operations.

(h) Employ full use of psychological and civil affairs programs in support of internal security actions.

(i) Establish concurrently means for assuring continued security.

(j) Retain the Civil Guard under the temporary control of the Department of Defense for the duration of the emergency.

(k) To develop the force basis for the RVNAF to cope with the insurgency now threatening the GVN and to build capacity for resistance to external aggression.

(3) Economic: to be forwarded in supplemental submission to this basic plan.

(4) Psychological:

(a) Improve communications between the Government of Viet-Nam and its people.

(b) Attract the loyalty of the population to the GVN and to the Diem regime.

(c) Acquaint the people with the aims and actions of the GVN, and persuade them that the GVN is acting in their interests.

(d) Counteract among the people and in the military sense within the RVNAF VC propaganda denigrating the Diem regime and painting it as opposed to the reunification of North and South Viet-Nam.

(e) Foster a spirit of national unity and purpose among all elements of the Vietnamese society.

(f) Strengthen the people's confidence in and respect for the RVNAF as a security force vis-a-vis the VC.

(g) Raise South Viet-Nam's prestige among the peoples of other countries especially in Asia and Africa as a means of enhancing the GVN's national security and stability.

#### c. Concept of Operations:

(1) General:

(a) Political Operations. Refer to Embassy communications listed in political section under "Tasks" above.



(b) Politico/Military Operations. In order to provide protection which the people require, it is necessary to exercise more than an ordinary degree of control over the population. Among the more important operations required are those for exercising control in such manner as to isolate insurgents and sympathizers from the support of the populace. Such techniques as registration and identification, food control and control of movement will be implemented as appropriate.

(c) Military Operations:

1. There are immediate actions, civil and military, which the GVN can and must take to halt or slow down the current and extremely serious adverse security trend until such time as the necessary increased offensive capability can be brought to bear. These actions include, of course, extraordinary action by the GVN to:

a. Further develop a national emergency operations control system.

b. Implement the National Planning System.

c. Implement the plan for a national intelligence organization and system with particular emphasis on obtaining information at the village level, and integrating effort at the national level.

d. Fully employ military capabilities to include strengthening and reorganizing military command and control channels.

e. Establish a border/coastal surveillance system.

f. Improve the civil and military communications system.

g. Reduce attrition rate of armed forces and utilize the trained manpower pool."

In the field of political tasks to achieve its stated objectives, the CIP cited the Embassy and other Department reports relating to the demarche by Durbrow and the later discussions in December. A covering cable presented a discussion by Ambassador Durbrow of the Country Team proposals, presenting these in three categories:

(1) Measures that Diem had, in fact, requested, and that required U.S. action, principally the proposed 20,000-man increase in ARVN.

(2) Measures which the GVN currently had "under study" or which would shortly be presented to the GVN, but on which foot-dragging and some resistance could be expected; such as implementation of a firm military chain of command (in particular, willingness by Diem to cease by-passing his military staff and commanders in dealing with province chiefs and subordinate commanders); establishment of a military operational command for counterinsurgency operations; and development of a national plan for counterinsurgency.

(3) Recommendations "considered by the Country Team to be indispensable and in the GVN's own best interests," but which would "probably not be particularly palatable to the GVN"; this situation pertained particularly to certain political actions and concepts of the military-civilian relationship. (For example, strengthening the role of the National Assembly, and including respected oppositionists in the Cabinet.)

The disagreement between the Ambassador and Chief, MAAG, evident in the CIP, reflected the divergences that were to persist among U.S. decision-makers through 1961. Durbrow's position, reflected in later, similar dispatches to the State Department, and to the President himself, was that the unpalatable political measures aimed at "liberalizing" the regime were essential to the achievement of U.S. (and GVN) goals in Vietnam. Therefore, in the face of resistance to such measures by Diem it was necessary to assert some leverage to win his acceptance; and the most expedient means of leverage would be to postpone or threaten withholding of those measures of support that Diem actually wanted, until Diem should have complied with our aims in the political area. In the case of the program represented by the CIP, this could only mean withholding approval of part or all of the funding for the 20,000 man force level increase that Diem (backed by MAAG) had requested. Earlier, Durbrow may have turned to this tactic because of a suspicion that the 20,000-man increase was not really essential. By January 1961, he was evidently prepared to agree on the need for additional troops (referring to the increasing threat posed by the Soviet airlift in Laos), but he still pointed to the tactical requirement that somehow Diem had to be induced to take unpalatable political actions. "These questions are an integral part of the overall plan and are essential to its successful accomplishment. Consideration should, therefore, be given to what actions we are prepared to take to encourage or, if necessary to force, acceptance of all essential elements of the plan."



A considerable part of the rationale within the CIP -- including one long annex -- was devoted to justifying the enlarged force level for RVNAF, emphasizing that action must be taken to implement the increase as quickly as possible, since from one to two years would be required to fill the new units. It could be foreseen that those who saw the Viet Cong threat as most important (which was the basic tone of the CIP, and subsequently of the DOD), and who regarded military measures against this threat as most urgent, including measures that would require increased acceptance and cooperation by Diem, would be impatient with "pressure tactics" when they involved delays on "vital" military matters in the hope of winning concessions from Diem in political areas that seemed peripheral or trivial in the context of the communist insurgency.

A factor tipping the scales toward what might be called the Diem/MAAG/DOD priorities in each instance was the coincident, and increasing, need to "reassure" Diem of U.S. support for Vietnam and for him personally, in the light of events that had shaken that assurance (and hence, Diem's willingness to cooperate on less controversial measures) such as, in Diem's eyes, U.S. involvement in the abortive November 1960 coup, U.S. pressures via Durbrow for political reforms, and, above all, U.S. policy with respect to Laos. This need to reassure Diem was at cross purposes with the use of pressure tactics to influence him and, in part, conflicted with the U.S. desire to have Diem adopt moves (such as delegating authority to a single military commander, or include oppositionists in his cabinet) that he regarded as directly threatening continuation of his rule.

c. Presidential Action on the CIP

Ten days after President Kennedy's inauguration, on 30 January 1961, a memo from the President to the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense noted that as a result of a meeting on 28 January he had authorized:

" . . . an increase of expenditure of \$28.4 million to expand the Viet-Nam force level by 20,000; and an increase in expenditure of \$12.7 million for a program to improve the quality of the Viet-Nam civil guard." \*

These figures represented the dollar costs of the increases recommended in the CIP. In passing on this authorization from the President in a Joint State-Defense-ICA message, the Department pointed out:

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\* The author, Benjamin Bock, of the State Department Study: Recent American Policy and Diplomacy Concerning Vietnam, 1960-1963, Research Project #630, January 1965, notes that Chalmers V. Wood, the Vietnamese desk officer in the 1961 period, had told him in June 1963 that President Kennedy had personally approved the Counterinsurgency Plan.

" . . . U.S. would as Plan provides expect GVN absorb local currency costs these increases and does not contemplate further US-? dollar grants to generate additional local currency for this purpose." (Joint State-Defense-ICA Message, Deptel 1054 to Saigon, 3 February 1961, p. 1)

The Department suggested that the Ambassador and the Chief, MAAG, prepare an abridged version of the plan to present to Diem and emphasized:

" . . . Immediate purpose Plan is to enable GVN defeat insurgency, but Plan also envisages that GVN must move on political front towards liberalization to retain necessary popular cooperation; that various economic steps be taken; and that there be adequate cooperation with RKG on frontier control. It considered US view that success requires implementation entire plan."

" . . . Future funding will require Congressional approval. Views Congress likely be influenced by developments in political as well as security situation. FY 61 component represents large increase in US support Viet-Nam. If GVN willing to accept the obligations involved in its implementation, the US is ready give full and immediate support in carrying it out." (Ibid., pp. 1-2)

In a passage suggesting some naivete on the part of the Department as to actual working procedures and the rhythm of negotiations in Saigon, the Department suggested:

" . . . proposing to Diem that members US Missions ready confer with GVN opposite numbers work out agreed version Plan within, say two week time limit . . . " (Ibid., p. 2)

The guidance concluded:

"If Ambassador considers GVN does not provide necessary cooperation, he should inform Washington with recommendations which may include suspension US contribution." (Ibid., p. 3)

On 2 February 1961, Walt W. Rostow showed the new President the memorandum on Vietnam written by General Lansdale (reproduced above). The President read it in Rostow's presence, and said, "This is the worst yet . . . You know Ike never briefed me about Vietnam . . . " It has been reported that shortly thereafter Lansdale was summoned unexpectedly to the White House, and was ushered into a meeting of principle Cabinet and National Security Council



members. At this meeting, the President discussed Lansdale's report, and apparently indicated that Lansdale would be sent to Vietnam in "a high capacity." If the appointment of Lansdale to replace Durbrow was under active consideration, there is no record so indicating. In March, Frederick E. Nolting was appointed to replace Ambassador Durbrow. (Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, op. cit., 320; Shaplen, "The Lost Revolution," op. cit. 148-149)

d. Implementing the CIP

In the meantime, the Ambassador and the Chief, MAAG, carried out their instructions from Washington, obtaining an interview with Diem and Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency, on February 13, 1961. Both Diem and Thuan expressed concern as to how they could finance the local currency costs for the additional 20,000 men. The Ambassador expressed his firm conviction that by taking "extraordinary measures" the Vietnamese government could raise sufficient piasters. When Thuan asked what the U.S. position would be if the Vietnamese could not see their way to finance the plan as a whole, the Ambassador replied that the plan was a "comprehensive document" and therefore all facets should "basically be carried out." The Ambassador reported that he was "not very sanguine" that an agreed plan could be worked out by the end of February. (From Saigon Deptel 1367, 13 February 1961, summarized in State Department Research Project No. 630, op. cit., p. 15)

A month later, Ambassador Durbrow discussed the status of GVN acceptance of the CIP with Thuan. On the political measures:

" . . . He repeated question of bringing opposition members into cabinet would depend on whether such persons would agree with government policy. I replied I felt certain GVN would find loyal oppositionists who would be in basic agreement with policy and therefore urged this step be taken. Thuan expressed skepticism. He repeated legislative investigation of executive only practiced in US, therefore GVN would not accept this suggestion. . . ." (Saigon 1454 to SecState, 11 March 1961, p. 1)

On March 16, Durbrow raised the subject of the CIP with Diem; by this time it was clear that agreement was being reached on the main military CIP suggestions to a degree "which MAAG considers it can live with provided GVN follows through with proper implementation," but the GVN position on other "fundamental" (in Durbrow's eyes) CIP suggestions -- i.e., in the political sphere -- was not yet clear. (Saigon Deptel 1466, to SecState, 16 March 1961) Durbrow enumerated these remaining questions:

"(1) We believe it important to attain further national unity that Diem make reasonable offer take one or two non-commie oppositionists into cabinet.

"(2) I stated we still receiving allegations and rumors about Can Lao Party secret activities which, whether true or not, are harmful to GVN. I again urged that party come out in open or dissolve itself and suggested might be worthwhile pass law or issue decree stating against law have any secret parties Viet-Nam, pointing out this would help give legal basis act against various secret parties even covert communist-front organizations.

"Diem interrupted me at this point to describe what he called favorable evolution among non-communist oppositionists which now taking place. He stated many of those who took part in coup see errors their ways and now realize if they had won they would have only assisted communist take-over. According Diem most oppositionists, whether those arrested because of coup or others, now in process changing their attitude and realize it in national interests they try to work more closely with GVN. For this reason too soon to make offer cabinet posts to oppositionists but, without making firm promise, he stated that if some non-commies could agree basic policy GVN he might take them into government after election.

"He did not directly reply to my Can Lao suggestion but stated that more and more oppositionists and public in general coming to realize allegations and rumors re party are not true. I interjected these developments all more reason why Can Lao Party should come into open or dissolve and why he should seriously make reasonable offers non-communists enter govt. Diem made no promises." (Saigon Deptel 1466 to SecState, 16 March 1961, Section 1 of 2, p. 2)

In connection with the proposed Central Intelligence organization, Diem stated he had finally chosen an officer to run this; on the issue of better relations with the Cambodian Government, to the end of working out border control arrangements, Diem was, as always, very negative on the possibilities. Raising once more the issue of dealings with the peasants in connection with agrovilles:

"I again urged he make modest payments to peasants called upon furnish labor, particularly those for instance who work on agrovilles but would not live there and would thus get no benefit from their labor. Diem replied peasants everywhere except those in Cochin-China area gladly contributed to



community development. He added if he tried to tax them it would cause more disgruntlement. He argued even those who did not get into agrovilles received considerable benefits from establishment nearby markets, schools, hospitals and maternity wards. I stated that while this undoubtedly true, corvee labor was one of principal things used by communists to cause disgruntlement Delta." (Ibid., Section 2 of 2, pp. 2-3)

The Ambassador concluded with the following:

"Comments: Diem was most affable, exuded confidence and for first time expressed some gratitude our CIP efforts which he promised implement as best he could. Again before giving full green light believe we should await outcome detail discussion by GVN-US officials. In meantime MAAG quietly ordering some equipment for 20,000 increase (Embtel 1444)." (Ibid., Section 2 of 2, p. 4)

With the approval of the Counterinsurgency Plan for Vietnam and with the appointment of Ambassador Nolting, the Kennedy Administration launched its efforts to stem the Viet Cong tide in South Vietnam.



# UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS

## 1945 - 1967

IV.B.1.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

THE KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961





SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

When Kennedy took office, the prospect of an eventual crisis in Vietnam had been widely recognized in the government, although nothing much had yet been done about it. Our Ambassador in Saigon had been sending worried cables for a year, and twice in recent months (in September 1960 and again in December) had ended an appraisal of the situation by cautiously raising the question of whether the U.S. would not sooner or later have to move to replace Diem. Barely a week after taking office, Kennedy received and approved a Counter-Insurgency Plan (CIP) which, at what seems to have been a rather leisurely pace, had been going through drafting and staffing for the previous eight months.

The CIP was a most modest program by the standard we have become accustomed to in Vietnam. It offered Diem financial support for a 20,000 man increase in his army, which then stood at 150,000; plus support for about half of the counter-guerrilla auxiliary force known as the Civil Guard. In return, it asked Diem for a number of reforms which appeared to the American side as merely common sense -- such as straightening out command arrangements for the army under which 42 different officials directly responsible to Diem (38 province chiefs, 3 regional commanders, and a Chief of Staff) shared operational command.

The CIP was superseded in May by an enlarged version of the same program, and the only longer term significance the original program held was that it presumably offered the Administration a lesson in dealing with Diem (and perhaps, although it was not foreseen then, a lesson in dealing with Vietnamese governments generally.) The negotiations dragged on and on; the U.S. military and eventually most of the civilians both in Saigon and Washington grew impatient for getting on with the war; Diem promised action on some of the American points, and finally even issued some decrees, none of which were really followed up. For practical purposes, the list of "essential reforms" proposed as part of the CIP, including those Diem had given the impression he agreed to, could have been substituted unchanged for the list of reforms the U.S. requested at the end of the year, with equal effect, as the quid pro quo demanded for the much enlarged U.S. aid offer that followed the Taylor Mission.

Negotiations with Diem came to an end in May, not because the issues had been resolved, but because the U.S. decided to forget trying to pressure Diem for a while and instead try to coax him into reforming by winning his confidence. Partly, no doubt, this reflected the view that pressure was



getting nowhere and the alternative approach might do better. Mainly, however, the changed policy, and the somewhat enlarged aid program that accompanied it, reflected the pressures created by the situation in neighboring Laos. (We will see that there is a strong case to be made that even the Fall, post-Taylor Mission, decisions were essentially dominated by the impact of Laos. But in May the situation was unambiguous. Laos, not anything happening in Vietnam, was the driving force.)

A preliminary step came April 20. Immediately following the Bay of Pigs disaster, and with the prospect of a disaster in Laos on the very near horizon, Kennedy asked Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric to work up a program for saving Vietnam. The program was delivered, as requested, a week later. It was a somewhat enlarged version of the CIP, with the implication, not spelled out in the paper, that the new effort would be put into effect without making any demands on Diem. (Simultaneously, Ambassador Durbow, who had been in Vietnam for four years, was being replaced by Nolting, and this added to the hope that a new start might be made with Diem.) There is nothing to suggest that anything more was expected of Gilpatric's program, and indeed all the evidence suggests that the main point of the exercise was to work General Lansdale into the role of government-wide coordinator and manager of the country's first major test in the new art of counter-insurgency. Lansdale served as Executive Officer of the Task Force which Gilpatric organized and which he proposed should be given a continuing, dominant role in managing the Vietnamese enterprise.

By the time the report was submitted on April 27 when the Laos crisis was reaching its peak, a new Geneva conference had been agreed upon. But there were serious doubts that the pro-western side in Laos would be left with anything to negotiate about by the time the conference opened. Even the U.S.-favored settlement (a coalition government) represented a major, if prudent, retreat from the previous U.S. position taken during the closing months of the Eisenhower Administration.) So the situation in Laos was bad, if unavoidable; and it followed right on the heels of the Bay of Pigs, and at a time when the Soviets were threatening to move against Berlin. The emphasis of the Gilpatric Task Force shifted from shaping up the counter-insurgency aid program for Vietnam, to finding ways to demonstrate to the South Vietnamese (and others) that a further retreat in Laos would not foreshadow an imminent retreat in Vietnam.

On April 28, an annex to the Task Force report proposed to counter the impact of Laos with U.S. support for an increase in South Vietnamese forces (the original report had proposed only more generous financial support for forces already planned under the CIP) and, further, a modest commitment of U.S. ground combat units in South Vietnam, with the nominal mission of establishing two training centers. On April 29, Kennedy endorsed the proposals of the original draft, but took no action on the far more significant proposals in the annex. On May 1, a revised Task Force draft came out, incorporating the Laos Annex proposals, and adding a recommendation that the U.S. make clear an intent to intervene in Vietnam to the extent needed to prevent a Viet Cong victory. At this point, practical control of the

Task Force appears to have shifted out of Gilpatric's (and Defense's) hands to State (and, apparently, George Ball.) A State redraft of the report came out May 3, which eliminated the special role laid out for Lansdale, shifted the chairmanship of the continuing Task Force to State, and blurred, without wholly eliminating, the Defense-drafted recommendations for sending U.S. combat units to Vietnam and for public U.S. commitments to save South Vietnam from Communism. But even the State re-draft recommended consideration of stationing American troops in Vietnam, for missions not involving combat with the Viet Cong, and a bilateral U.S.-SVN security treaty. On May 4 and 5, still acting under the pressures of the Laos crisis, the Administration implied (through a statement by Senator Fulbright at the White House following a meeting with Kennedy, and at Kennedy's press conference the next day) that it was considering stationing American forces in Vietnam. On May 6, a final draft of the Task Force report came out, essentially following the State draft of May 3. On May 8, Kennedy signed a letter to Diem, to be delivered by Vice President Johnson the next week, which promised Diem strong U.S. support, but did not go beyond the program outlined in the original Task Force report; it offered neither to finance expanded South Vietnamese forces, nor to station American troops in Vietnam. On May 11, the recommendations of the final, essentially State-drafted, report were formalized. But by now, the hoped for cease-fire in Laos had come off. Vice President Johnson in Saigon on the 12th of May followed through on his instructions to proclaim strong U.S. support for and confidence in Diem. When Diem talked of his worries about U.S. policy in Laos, Johnson, obviously acting on instructions, raised the possibility of stationing American troops in Vietnam or of a bilateral treaty. But Diem wanted neither at that time. Johnson's instructions were not available to this study, so we do not know how he would have responded if Diem had asked for either troops or a treaty, although the language of the Task Force report implies he would only have indicated a U.S. willingness to talk about these things. With Johnson, came the new Ambassador, Fritz Nolting, whose principal instruction was to "get on Diem's wavelength" in contrast to the pressure tactics of his predecessor.

A few weeks later, in June, Diem, responding to an invitation Kennedy had sent through Johnson, dispatched an aide to Washington with a letter outlining Saigon's "essential military needs." It asked for a large increase in U.S. support for Vietnamese forces (sufficient to raise ARVN strength from 170,000 to 270,000 men), and also for the dispatch of "selected elements of the American Armed Forces", both to establish training centers for the Vietnamese and as a symbol of American commitment to Vietnam. The proposal, Diem said, had been worked out with the advice of MAAG Saigon, whose chief, along with the JCS and at least some civilian officials, strongly favored getting American troops into Vietnam.

The question of increased support for Vietnamese forces was resolved through the use of the Staley Mission. This was normally a group of economic experts intended to work with a Vietnamese group on questions of economic policy. Particularly at issue was whether the Vietnamese could not be financing a larger share of their own defenses. But the economic proposals



and programs, all of which turned out to be pretty general and fuzzy, comprised a less important part of the report than the discussion of Vietnamese military requirements. Here the study group reflected the instructions of the two governments. On the basis of the Staley Report, the U.S. agreed to support a further increase of 30,000 in the RVNAF, but deferred a decision on the balance of the South Vietnamese request on the grounds that the question might not have to be faced since by the time the RVNAF reached 200,000 men, sometime late in 1962, the Viet Cong might already be on the run. The Staley Report also contained what by now had already become the usual sorts of nice words about the importance of social, political, and administrative reforms, which turned out to have the usual relevance to reality. The U.S. was still sticking to the May formula of trying to coax Diem to reform, instead of the equally unsuccessful January formula of trying to pressure him to reform.

The other issue -- the request for "elements of the American Armed Forces" -- was left completely obscure. From the record available, we are not sure that Diem really wanted the troops then, or whether Kennedy really was willing to send them if they were wanted. All we know is that Diem included some language in his letter that made the request a little ambiguous, and that Washington -- either on the basis of clarification from Diem's aide who delivered the letter, or on its own initiative, or some combination of both -- interpreted the letter as not asking for troops, and nothing came of the apparent request.

A new, and much more serious sense of crisis developed in September. This time the problem was not directly Laos, but strong indications of moderate deterioration of Diem's military position and very substantial deterioration of morale in Saigon. There was a sharp upswing in Viet Cong attacks in September, including a spectacular raid on a province capital 55 miles from Saigon during which the province chief was publicly beheaded by the insurgents. At the end of September, Diem surprised Koltzing by asking the U.S. for a U.S.-GVN defense treaty. By Diem's account the loss of morale in Saigon was due to worries about U.S. policy growing out of the Laos situation. Both U.S. officials in Washington and South Vietnamese other than those closest to Diem, though, put most of the blame on deterioration within South Vietnam, although the demoralizing effect of Viet Cong successes was unquestionably magnified by uncertainties about the U.S. commitment to Vietnam. In response, President Kennedy sent General Taylor and Walt Rostow, then both on the White House staff, to Vietnam, accompanied by some less prominent officials from State and Defense.

What Taylor and Rostow reported was that Saigon faced a dual crisis of confidence, compounded out doubts arising from Laos that the U.S. would stick by South Vietnam, and doubts arising from the Viet Cong successes that Diem's unpopular and inefficient regime could beat the Viet Cong anyway. The report said that a U.S. military commitment in Vietnam was needed to meet the first difficulty; and that the second could best be met by supplying a generous infusion of American personnel to all levels of the Vietnamese government and army, who could, it was hoped, instill the Vietnamese with the right kind of winning spirit, and reform the regime "from the bottom up"

despite Diem's weaknesses. The report recommended the dispatch of helicopter companies and other forms of combat support, but without great emphasis on these units. Probably, although the record does not specifically say so, there was a general understanding that such units would be sent even before the report was submitted, and that is why there is relatively little emphasis on the need for them.

The crucial issue was what form the American military commitment had to take to be effective. Taylor, in an eyes only cable to the President, argued strongly for a task force in the delta, consisting mainly of army engineers to work where there had been a major flood. The delta was also where the VC were strongest, and Taylor warned the President that the force would have to conduct some combat operations and expect to take casualties. But Taylor argued that the balance of the program, less this task force, would be insufficient, for we had to "convince Diem that we are willing to join him in a showdown with the Viet Cong..."

We do not know what advice President Kennedy received from State: Sorenson claims all the President's advisors on Vietnam favored sending the ground force; but George Ball, at least, who may not have been part of the formal decision group, is widely reported to have opposed such a move; so did Galbraith, then Ambassador to India, who happened to be in Washington; and perhaps some others. From Defense, the President received a memo from McNamara for himself, Gilpatric, and the JCS, stating that they were "inclined to recommend" the Taylor program, but only on the understanding that it would be followed up with more troops as needed, and with a willingness to attack North Vietnam. (The JCS estimated that 40,000 American troops would be needed to "clean up" the Viet Cong.) The Taylor Mission Report, and Taylor's own cables, had also stressed a probable need to attack, or at least threaten to attack, North Vietnam.

The McNamara memo was sent November 8. But on November 11, Rusk and McNamara signed a joint memo that reversed McNamara's earlier position: it recommended deferring, at least for the time being, the dispatch of combat units. This obviously suited Kennedy perfectly, and the NSAM embodying the decisions was taken essentially verbatim from the recommendations of the Rusk/McNamara paper, except that a recommendation that the U.S. was committing itself to prevent the loss of Vietnam was deleted.

But where the Taylor Report had implied a continuation of the May policy of trying to coax Diem into cooperating with the U.S., the new program was made contingent on Diem's acceptance of a list of reforms; further Diem was to be informed that if he accepted the program the U.S. would expect to "share in decision-making"...rather than "advise only". Thus, the effect of the decision was to give Diem less than he was expecting (no symbolic commitment of ground forces) but to accompany this limited offer with demands for which Diem was obviously both unprepared and unwilling to accede to. On top of this, there was the enormous (and not always recognized) extent to which U.S. policy was driven by the unthinkability of



avoidably risking another defeat in Southeast Asia hard on the heels of the Laos retreat.

Consequently, the U.S. bargaining position was feeble. Further, Galbraith at least, and probably others, advised Kennedy that there was not much point to bargaining with Diem anyway, since he would never follow through on any promises he made. (Galbraith favored promoting an anti-Diem military coup at the earliest convenient moment.) Kennedy ended up settling for a set of promises that fell well short of any serious effort to make the aid program really contingent on reforms by Diem. Since the war soon thereafter began to look better, Kennedy never had occasion to reconsider his decision on combat troops; and no urgent reason to consider Galbraith's advice on getting rid of Diem until late 1963.

THE KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1960-1961	Situation in Vietnam	<p>According to Ambassador Durbrow there was widespread popular dissatisfaction with the Diem Government and a growing guerrilla threat. At the same time, there had been a very gradual growth of U.S. involvement in assisting the GVN to counter the VC.</p> <p>In the U.S. two questions influenced decisions about Vietnam: first, what should the U.S. give Diem to counter the communists; secondly, what -- if any -- demands should be posed as a <u>quid pro quo</u> for assistance?</p>
	US-Soviet Relations	<p>The problems of dealing with Moscow were far more pressing than those related to Vietnam. A feeling that America's position in the world had been eroded by the USSR prevailed; Kennedy was particularly determined to regain American strength, prestige and influence. Anything which could be construed as American weakness <u>vis-a-vis</u> the USSR was to be avoided. This affected policy toward Vietnam.</p>
	Situation in Laos	<p>The US-backed, pro-American faction under Phoumi Nosavan was losing to the pro-Communist/neutralist faction supported by the Soviet Union. Commitment of U.S. forces was rejected and on May 2, 1961 a cease-fire was declared. President Kennedy decided to support a coalition solution, even though the odds on coalition leader Souvanna Phouma's staying in power were very low. As a consequence of this decision, Washington believed that Southeast Asian leaders doubted the sincerity of the U.S. commitment to the area, and the U.S. felt</p>



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20 Jan 1961

President Kennedy  
Inaugurated

compelled to do something to restore confidence, demonstrate U.S. resolve and dispel any idea Moscow might have that the U.S. intended to withdraw from Southeast Asia. Laos was thus particularly influential in development of policy toward Vietnam.

28 Jan 1961

Kennedy Approves the  
Counterinsurgency  
Plan (CIP) for Viet-  
nam

Gradually developed during 1961, the CIP was to be the basis for expanded U.S. assistance to Vietnam. Kennedy automatically approved its main provisions; negotiations with Diem about the CIP began 13 February and continued through May of 1961. The U.S. offered \$28.4 million to support a 20,000-man increase in the ARVN (for a new total of 170,000); to train, equip and supply a 32,000-man Civil Guard at \$12.7 million. The full package added less than \$42 million to the current \$220 million aid program.

The CIP called for consolidation of the RVNAF chain of command (never fully accomplished under Diem.) No agreement was reached on the question of strategy during this period. (Diem wanted "strategic" outposts, Agrovilles, lines of strength throughout the country; the MAAG favored a "net and spear" concept -- small units operating out of pacified areas to find the enemy, call in reserve forces, gradually extend security to all of Vietnam.)

Civil reforms included urging Diem to broaden his government, include opposition political leaders in the cabinet, give the National Assembly some power, institute civic action to win hearts, minds and loyalty of the peasants.

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		The CIP assumed the GVN had the potential to cope with the VC if necessary corrective measures were taken and if adequate forces were provided. The implicit bargain of the plan: the U.S. would support "adequate forces" if Diem would institute "necessary corrective measures." Again, although socio-political reforms were sought through the CIP and other plans, they were not realized during the early Kennedy years.
Mid-Jan 1961	A Lansdale Report on Vietnam	Following a trip to Vietnam, Major General E. G. Lansdale called for strong support for Diem and recommended the U.S. demonstrate that support immediately. Only if Diem's confidence in the U.S. were restored would U.S. influence be effective, said Lansdale. He recommended the immediate transfer of Durbrow (he was "too close to the forest" and was not trusted by the GVN) and immediate adoption of social, economic, political and military programs to prove U.S. backing for Diem as well as help Diem stabilize the countryside.
February-May 1961	Durbrow Negotiations with Diem on the CIP	Diem stalled the implementation of his "major promises" (to establish a central intelligence organization, put operational control for counter-insurgency operations under the military command system, reform the cabinet and governmental administration). Washington held up the "green light" on aid as long as Diem stalled -- although the JCS and MAAG in Saigon were impatient to get on with the war and were annoyed by the delay. Finally, in mid-May (after Durbrow had ended his four-year tour in Vietnam) Diem implemented some "major promises" by decree. But nothing changed.



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
12 Apr 1961	Rostow Memorandum for President Kennedy	W. W. Rostow suggested several ways for "gearing-up the whole Vietnam operation." These included: assigning a first-rate, fulltime backstop man in Washington to Vietnam affairs (Lansdale); a Vice Presidential visit in Southeast Asia; exploring ways to use new American techniques and gadgets in the fight against the VC; replacing the ICA (AID) chief; high-level discussion of tactics for persuading Diem to broaden his government; a Presidential letter to Diem in which Kennedy would reaffirm support for him but express the urgency attached to finding a "more effective political and morale setting" for military operations.
20 Apr 1961	The Presidential Program for Vietnam	Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric was directed to appraise the current status and future prospects of the VC drive in South Vietnam, then recommend a series of actions to prevent communist domination of the GVN.  (At this same time: the Bay of Pigs invasion force surrendered and the Laos crisis was coming to a head.)  Gilpatric and Lansdale headed a Task Force established immediately to carry out these instructions.
27 Apr 1961	Gilpatric Task Force Report submitted; the NSC meets	This first Task Force draft called for a moderate acceleration of the CIP program approved in January, with stress on vigor, enthusiasm and strong leadership. The report recommended building on present US-GVN programs, infusing them with a new sense of urgency and creating action programs in almost every field to create a viable and increasingly democratic government in SVN to prevent communist domination. No ARVN increase

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beyond the already-authorized 20,000-man addition was recommended; a modest MAAG increase was proposed. The US would support the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps. Emphasis was on stabilizing the countryside, not on pressing Diem for political or administrative reforms. (Gilpatric wanted Lansdale to go to Vietnam immediately after the program was approved to consult with Vietnamese and US leaders and make further recommendations for action; but McNamara made Lansdale's mission contingent upon an invitation from the US Ambassador in Saigon -- an invitation that never came.)

The NSC was to discuss this report but the 27 April meeting was dominated by the acute Laotian crisis.

28 Apr 1961

Laos Annex to (first)  
Task Force Report

A report -- a response, really -- concerning the critical situation in Laos and its effect on Vietnam was prepared for the NSC on 28 April. It recommended a two-division ARVN increase and deployment of 3600 US troops to Vietnam (two 1600-man teams to train each new division; 400 Special Forces troops to speed over-all ARVN counterinsurgency training). Rationale: to enable ARVN to guard against conventional invasion of South Vietnam. (Both the increased forces and their justification were different from two earlier reports. Lansdale had advocated no ARVN increase but felt some US force build-up was called for as a demonstration of American support for the GVN. Gilpatric's military aide, Colonel E. F. Black, wrote the other report which saw no need for more US troops but recommended expansion of ARVN to meet the threat of increased infiltration. These



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29 Apr 1961

Kennedy Decisions on  
the Draft Report

views were rejected in favor of Black's second paper which advocated more ARVN troops -- to counter overt aggression, not increased infiltration -- and commitment of US troops for training purposes -- not for political reassurance or demonstration of US resolve. Black's second paper was sent to the NSC.)

Kennedy did not act on the Laos Annex. He approved only the limited military proposals contained in the first Gilpatrick Task Force report. The 685-man MAAG would be increased to 785 to enable it to train the approved 20,000 new ARVN troops. Kennedy also authorized the MAAG to support and advise the Self Defense Corps (40,000 men); authorized MAP support for the entire Civil Guard of 68,000 (vice 32,000 previously supported); ordered installation of radar surveillance equipment and okayed MAP support and training for the Vietnamese Junk Force.

1 May 1961

NSC Meets; New Draft  
of the Task Force  
Report Issued

Kennedy again deferred decision on sending troops into Laos apparently because the feeling that the US would not make such a move was now firm.

The 1 May draft report was little different from the 28 April version. The Laos Annex was incorporated into the main paper; the US was to make known its readiness to "intervene unilaterally" in Southeast Asia to fulfill SEATO commitments (vice intervene in conjunction with SEATO forces). ARVN increases were now justified by the threat of overt aggression as well as increased infiltration.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
3 May 1961	State (George Ball) Revision of Task Force Report	<p>This draft was very different from the original. Lansdale's role was eliminated; the Gilpatric-Lansdale Task Force was to be replaced by a new group chaired by Ball, then Undersecretary of State. (Lansdale reacted with a "strong recommendation" that Defense stay out of the Directorship proposed by State and said the "US past performance and theory of action, which State apparently desires to continue, simply offers no sound basis for winning...") In State's rewritten political section of the report, the Defense recommendation to make clear US determination to intervene unilaterally if necessary to save South Vietnam from communism was replaced by a proposal to explore new bilateral treaty arrangements with Diem (arrangements which might mean intervention against the guerrillas but might mean intervention only against DRV attack). The need for new arrangements was tied to the "loss" of Laos. State incorporated unchanged the Defense draft as the military section of its revised report, but implied "further study" would be given to some Defense recommendations. Overall, the State revision tried to tone down commitments to Vietnam suggested in the Defense version. It left the President a great deal of room to maneuver without explicitly overruling recommendations presented him.</p>
5 May 1961	NSC Meeting	<p>Again, Laos was the main subject. Most agreed the chance for salvaging anything out of the cease-fire and coalition government was slim indeed. Ways in which to reassure Vietnam and Thailand were sought. The Vice President's trip to Southeast Asia was announced after the meeting.</p>



<u>DATE</u>	<u>DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCR</u>
6 May 1961	Re-Draft Force	<p>Here, actions were contained; annex; the political section; less panic over; deployment of; less definite --; which "might"; NSC decision following; between Vice President and President Diem." being studied, said the report said: Diem fully confident of US; it is "essential" confidence in and with the United States promptly." (Lansdale's of January, April, report called for a; in the present structure," "believed" of inducements plus; measures might work, but; enthusiastic both about; chances of success. the-only-available- is evident here.</p>
10 May 1961	61	<p>"Assur to Mol communally sufficient DNF/CH static operat cate U of 9 deploy also.)</p> <p>political decision is East Asia outside the here," the JCS emphatically deployment of forces to provide a rent to potential tion, release ARVN from ive counterinsurgency ist training and indi- ss. (In JCSM 311-61 e Chiefs recommended US forces to Thailand</p>
11 May 1961		<p>Direct of a s tion of a poss Southe "took no dec</p> <p>examination" by DOD the size and composition which might comprise commitment of troops to ia. In effect, Kennedy "took of the study but made on the issue of troop</p>

DATEEVENT OR DOCUMENTDESCRIPTION

9-15 May 1961

Vice President  
Johnson Visits  
Southeast Asia

commitment. The Ambassador in Saigon was empowered to open negotiations about a bilateral treaty but was directed to make no commitments without further review by the President. These recommendations from the May 6 Task Force report were approved: help the GVN increase border patrol and counterinsurgency capability through aerial surveillance and new technological devices; help set up a center to test new weapons and techniques; help ARVN implement health, welfare and public work projects; deploy a 400-man special forces group to Nha Trang to accelerate ARVN training; instruct JCS, CINCPAC, MACV to assess the military utility of an increase in ARVN from 170,000 to 200,000 (the two-division increase recommended previously).

Purpose: to reassure Asian leaders that despite Laos, the United States could be counted on to support them. Johnson reported the mission had halted the decline of confidence in the United States, but did not restore confidence already lost. Johnson strongly believed that faith must be restored, the "battle against communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination" (or the US would be reduced to a fortress America with defenses pulled back to California's shores); he believed there was no alternative to US leadership in Southeast Asia but that any help extended -- military, economic, social -- must be part of a mutual effort and contingent upon Asian willingness to "take the necessary measures to make our aid effective." He reported that American troops were neither required nor desired by Asian leaders at this time.



DATEEVENT OR DOCUMENTDESCRIPTION

18 May 1961

Lansdale Memorandum  
for Gilpatric

Calling Thailand and Vietnam the most immediate, most important trouble spots, the Vice President said the US "must decide whether to support Diem -- or let Vietnam fall," opted for supporting Diem, said "the most important thing is imaginative, creative, American management of our military aid program," and reported \$50 million in military and economic assistance "will be needed if we decide to support Vietnam." The same amount was recommended for Thailand.

The Vice President concluded by posing this as the fundamental decision: "whether...to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia or throw in the towel." Cautioning that "heavy and continuing costs" would be required, that sometime the US "may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail," Johnson recommended "we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action."

Lansdale noted Diem's rejection of US combat forces per se at this time but pointed out Diem seemed willing to accept troops for training purposes only. At this same time, MAAG Chief McGarr requested 16,000 US troops (combat units) be sent, nominally to establish centers to train RVNAF divisions. If Diem would not accept 16,000, McGarr would settle for 10,000 men.

5 June 1961

Rostow Note to  
McNamara

Saying "we must think of the kind of forces for Thailand now, Vietnam later," Rostow suggested "aircraft, helicopters, communications, men,

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
		Special Forces, militia teachers, etc." would be needed to support a "counter-guerrilla war in Vietnam." Rostow does not mention combat units.
9 June 1961	Diem Letter to Kennedy	Here, in response to Vice President Johnson's request that he outline military needs, Diem did request US troops explicitly for training RVNAF "officers and technical specialists" -- not entire divisions. He proposed ARVN be increased from 170,000 to 270,000 to "counter the ominous threat of communist domination" -- a threat he documented by inflated infiltration figures and words about the "perilous" situation created by the Laos solution. To train these 100,000 new ARVN troops Diem asked for "considerable expansion" of the MAAG in the form of "selected elements of the American Armed Forces."
Mid-June to July 1961	The Staley Mission	A team headed by Eugene Staley (Stanford Research Institute) was to work with Vietnamese officials in an effort to resolve the continuing problem of how Vietnam was to finance its own war effort (deficit financing, inflation, the commodity import program, piaster/dollar exchange rates, all presented difficulties). But the Staley group became the vehicle for force level discussions and economic issues were treated rather perfunctorily. The group "does not consider itself competent to make specific recommendations as to desired force levels" but adopted two alternative levels for "economic planning purposes": 200,000 if the insurgency in Vietnam remains at present levels, if Laos does not fall; 270,000 if the Vietcong significantly increase the insurgency and if the communists win <u>de facto</u> control of Laos.



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Aug 1961	Kennedy Decision NSAM 65	President Kennedy agreed with the Staley Report (of 4 August) that security requirements demanded first priority, that economic and social programs had to be accelerated, that it was in the US interest to promote a viable Vietnam. He agreed to support an ARVN increase to 200,000 if Diem in turn agreed to a plan for using these forces. The 270,000 level was thus disapproved. But the plan for using ARVN forces had not yet been drawn. Diem had not yet designed -- much less implemented -- social reforms supposedly required in return for US assistance.
15 Aug 1961	NIE 14-3/53.61	Although collapse of the Saigon regime might come by a coup or from Diem's death, its fall because of a "prolonged and difficult" struggle was not predicted.
Late Aug 1961	Theodore White Reports	"The situation gets worse almost week by week..." particularly the military situation in the delta. If the U.S. decides it must intervene, White asked if we had the people, instruments or clear objectives to make it successful.
1 Sep 1961	General McGarr Reports	The ARVN has displayed increased efficiency, a spirit of renewed confidence is "beginning to permeate the people, the GVN and the Armed Forces."
27 Sep 1961	Nolting Reports	Nolting was "unable report...progress toward attainment task force goals of creating viable and increasingly democratic society," called the government and civil situation unchanged from early September. A series of large scale VC attacks in central Vietnam, the day-long VC seizure of Phuoc Vinh, capital of [former] Phuoc Thanh Province -- 55 miles from Saigon -- in

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
27 Sep 1961 (Continued)		which the VC publicly beheaded Diem's province chief and escaped before government troops arrived and increased infiltration through Laos demonstrated "that the tide has not yet turned" militarily.
1 Oct 1961	Diem Request	Diem requested a bilateral treaty with the U.S. This surprised Nolting but probably did not surprise the White House, already warned by White of the grave military situation.
1 Oct 1961	State "First 12-Month Report"	This political assessment mirrored Nolting's "no progress" report but State found the military situation more serious than Embassy reports had indicated.
5 Oct 1961	The "Rostow Proposal"	Suggested a 25,000-man SEATO force be put into Vietnam to guard the Vietnam/Laos border between the DMZ and Cambodia. (The Pathet Lao had gained during September, as had VC infiltration through Laos to the GVN. This prompted plans for U.S. action.)
9 Oct 1961	JCSM 717-61	The JCS rejected the Rostow proposal: forces would be stretched thin, they could not stop infiltration, and would be at the worst place to oppose potential DRV/CHICOM invasion. The Chiefs wanted to make a "concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam." But if this were "politically unacceptable" the Chiefs "provided...a possible limited interim course of action": deployment of about 20,000 troops to the central highlands near Pleiku to assist the GVN and free certain GVN forces for offensive action against the VC.



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
10 Oct 1961	"Concept of Intervention in Vietnam"	Drafted by Alexis Johnson, the paper blended Rostow's border control proposal with the JCS win-control-of-the-highlands counter-proposal for the initial mission of U.S. forces in Vietnam. "The real and ultimate objective" of U.S. troops was also addressed. To defeat the Vietcong and render Vietnam secure under a non-Communist government, Johnson "guessed" three divisions would be the ultimate force required in support of the "real objective." The paper estimated a satisfactory settlement in Laos would reduce but not eliminate infiltration into South Vietnam, that even if infiltration were cut down, there was no assurance that the GVN could "in the foreseeable future be able to defeat the Viet Cong." Unilateral U.S. action would probably be necessary. The plan's viability was dependent on the degree in which the GVN accelerated "political and military action in its own defense."
11 Oct 1961	NSC Meeting on Vietnam	The NSC considered four papers: the Alexis Johnson draft; an NIE estimate that SEATO action would be opposed by the DRV, Viet Cong and the Soviet Union (airlift), that these forces stood a good chance of thwarting the SEATO intervention; third, a JCS estimate that 40,000 U.S. troops would be required to "clean up the Viet Cong threat" and another 128,000 men would be needed to oppose DRV/CHICOM intervention (draining 3 to 4 reserve divisions). Finally, a memorandum from William Bundy to McNamara which said "it is really now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong," and gave "an early and hard-hitting operation" a 70 percent chance of doing that. Bundy added, the chance of cleaning up the situation "depends

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Oct 1961 (Continued)		on Diem's effectiveness, which is very problematical," favored going in with 70-30 odds but figured the odds would slide down if the U.S. "let, say, a month go by" before moving.
13 Oct 1961	Saigon Message 488	Reversing his previous position, Diem requested an additional fighter-bomber squadron, civilian pilots for helicopters and C-47 transports and U.S. combat units for a "combat-training" mission near the DMZ, possibly also in the highlands. He asked consideration be given a possible request for a division of Chiang Kai-shek's troops to support the GVN. Nolting recommended "serious and prompt" attention for the request.
14 Oct 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	In an article leaked by the government -- perhaps by Kennedy himself -- leaders were called reluctant to send U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia. Obviously untrue, the leak was probably designed to end speculation about troop deployment and guard Kennedy's freedom of action.
20 Oct 1961	CINCPAC Recommendation	Admiral Felt felt the pros and cons of U.S. troop deployment added up in favor of <u>no</u> deployment until other means of helping Diem had been exhausted.
18-24 Oct 1961	Taylor Mission to Vietnam	On the 18th, Diem said he wanted no U.S. combat troops for any mission. He repeated his request for a bilateral defense treaty, more support for ARVN and combat-support equipment (helicopters, aircraft, etc.).
23 Oct 1961	Ch MAAG Message	General McGarr suggested that the serious Mekong River flood could provide a cover for U.S. troop deployment: combat units could be disguised as humanitarian relief forces and be dispatched to the delta.



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
25 Oct 1961	Saigon Message 536	Taylor reported the pervasive crisis of confidence and serious loss in Vietnamese national morale created by Laos and the flood, weakened the war effort. To cope with this Taylor recommended: Improvement of intelligence on the VC; building ARVN mobility; blocking infiltration into the highlands by organizing a border ranger force; introduction of U.S. forces either for emergency, short-term assistance, or for more substantial, long-term support (a flood relief plus military reserve task force). Diem had reacted favorably "on all points."
1 Nov 1961	BAGUIO Message 0005	Taylor told the President, Rusk and McNamara "we should put in a task force (6-8,000 men) consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a U.S. military presence in Vietnam capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong..."
1 Nov 1961	BAGUIO 0006 <u>EYES ONLY</u> FOR THE PRESIDENT	Taylor concluded that the communist strategy of taking over Southeast Asia by guerrilla warfare was "well on the way to success in Vietnam"; he said the GVN was caught in "interlocking circles" of bad tactics and bad administrative arrangements" which allow VC gains and invite a political crisis. He recommended more U.S. support for paramilitary groups and ARVN mobility; the MAAG should be reorganized and increased and the task force introduced to "conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which (it) is stationed," among other things. Taylor felt the disadvantages of deployment were outweighed by gains, said SVN is "not an ex-

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1 Nov 1961 (Continued)		cessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate" and the "risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN" are not impressive: North Vietnam "is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing...there is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of communist manpower... particularly if our air power is allowed a free hand against logistical targets..."
3 Nov 1961	Taylor Report	The "Evaluation and Summary" section suggested urgency and optimism: SVN is in trouble, major U.S. interests are at stake; prompt and energetic U.S. action -- military, economic, political -- can lead to victory without a U.S. take-over of the war, can cure weaknesses in the Diem regime. That the Vietnamese must win the war was a unanimous view -- but most mission participants believed all Vietnamese operations could be substantially improved by America's "limited partnership" with the GVN. The GVN is cast in the best possible light; any suggestion that the U.S. should limit rather than expand its commitment -- or face the need to enter the battle in full force at this time -- is avoided. Underlying the summary was the notion that "graduated measures on the DRV (applied) with weapons or our own choosing" could reverse any adverse trend in the South. And ground troops were always possible. The Taylor Report recommended the U.S. make obvious its readiness to act, develop reserve strength in the U.S. "to cover action in Southeast Asia up to the nuclear threshold in that area" and thereby sober the enemy and discourage escalation. However, bombing was a more likely Vietnam contingency than was use of ground troops; the latter



DATEEVENT OR DOCUMENTDESCRIPTION

3 Nov 1961  
(Continued)

option was tied to a U.S. response to renewed fighting in Laos and/or overt invasion of South Vietnam. But Taylor suggested troops be sent to Diem; the Taylor Report and cables recommend combat troop deployment to Vietnam. (A message from Nolting summarizing the Diem-Taylor meeting on which the recommendations apparently rest (Saigon message 541, 25 Oct 61) does not indicate any enthusiasm on Diem's part to deployment of troops, however. He hinted U.S. troops for training might be requested, then dropped the subject.)

Appendices to the Taylor Report written by members of the group give a slightly different picture. There is less optimism about the GVN's chances of success, less optimism about chances of U.S. action -- political or military -- tipping the balance. For example: William Jordan (State) said almost all Vietnamese interviewed had emphasized the gravity of the situation, growing VC successes and loss of confidence in Diem. The ARVN lacked aggressiveness, was devoid of any sense of urgency, short of able leaders. Sterling Cottrell (State) said: It is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with U.S. assistance. Thus it would be a mistake to make an irrevocable U.S. commitment to defeat communists in South Vietnam. Foreign military forces cannot win the battle at the village level -- where it must be joined; the primary responsibility for saving Vietnam must rest with the GVN. For these reasons Cottrell argued against a treaty which would either shift ultimate responsibility to the U.S. or engage a full U.S. commitment to defeat the Vietcong.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
5 Nov 1961	SNIE 10-4-61	This estimated the DRV would respond to an increased U.S. troop commitment by increasing support to the Vietcong. If U.S. commitment to the GVN grew, so would DRV support to the VC. Four possible U.S. courses were given: airlift plus more help for ARVN; deployment of 8-10,000 troops as a flood relief task force; deployment of 25-40,000 combat troops; with each course, warn Hanoi of U.S. determination to hold SVN and U.S. intention to bomb the DRV if its support for the VC did not cease. The SNIE estimated air attacks against the North would not cause its VC support to stop and figured Moscow and Peking would react strongly to air attacks.
8 Nov 1961	McNamara Memorandum for the President	Secretary McNamara, Gilpatric and the JCS were "inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions." The memorandum said the fall of Vietnam would create "extremely serious" strategic implications worldwide, that chances were "probably sharply against" preventing that fall without a U.S. troop commitment but that even with major troop deployment (205,000 was the maximum number of ground forces estimated necessary to deal with a large overt invasion from the DRV and/or China) the U.S. would still be at the mercy of external forces -- Diem, Laos, domestic political problems, etc. -- and thus success could not be guaranteed. McNamara recommended against deployment of a task force (the 8,000-man group mentioned in the Taylor Report) "unless we are willing to make an affirmative decision" to full support a commitment to save South Vietnam.



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
11 Nov 1961	Rusk/McNamara Memorandum for the President	<p>This may have been prepared at Kennedy's specific instruction; it recommended what Kennedy wanted to hear: that the decision to commit major ground forces could be deferred. In this paper, rhetoric is escalated from that of McNamara's 8 November memorandum but U.S. actions recommended are far less significant, less committing. Military courses are divided into two phases: first, promptly deploy support troops and equipment (helicopters, transport aircraft, maritime equipment and trainers, special intelligence and air reconnaissance groups, other men and materiel to improve training, logistics, economic and other assistance programs). Then study and <u>possibly</u> deploy major ground combat forces at a later date. Despite the clear warning that even deployment of major U.S. units could not assure success against communism, the memorandum's initial recommendation was that the U.S. "commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism," be prepared to send troops and to "strike at the source of aggression in North Vietnam." A number of diplomatic moves (in the U.N., in NATO and SEATO councils, etc.) are suggested to signal U.S. determination; economic, social and other programs designed to help South Vietnam are suggested; ways to elicit improvements from Diem are recommended.</p>
14 Nov 1961	DEPTEL 619 to Saigon	<p>This was Nolting's guidance, based on the Rusk/McNamara memorandum. Nolting was told the anti-guerrilla effort "must essentially be a GVN task...No amount of extra aid can be substitute for GVN taking measures to permit <u>[it]</u> to assume offensive</p>

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
14 Nov 1961		and strengthen the administrative and political bases of government ....Do not propose to introduce into GVN the U.S. combat troops now but propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from North. Shall decide later on course of action should infiltration not be radically reduced." Diem's taking necessary measures -- political, military, economic -- to improve his government and relations with the people were a prerequisite to further U.S. assistance: "Package should be presented as first steps in a partnership in which the U.S. is prepared to do more as joint study of facts and GVN performance makes increased U.S. aid possible and productive." Strictly for his own information, Nolting was told Defense was "preparing plans for the use of U.S. combat forces in SVN under various contingencies, including stepped up infiltration as well as organized...(military) intervention. However, objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of U.S. combat forces." And, Nolting was to tell Diem: "We would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affect the security situation."
22 Nov 1961	NSAM 111	Called the "First Phase of Vietnam Program" this NSAM approved all Rusk/McNamara recommendations of 11 November except the first one: their initial recommendation that the U.S. commit itself to saving South Vietnam was omitted.
7 Dec 1961	Alexis Johnson/Rostow Redraft ("Clarification") of Nolting's 14 November guidance	"What we have in mind is that in operations directly related to the security situation, partnership will be so close that one party



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
7 Dec 1961 (Continued)		<p>will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultation."</p> <p>This is different from the idea that American involvement should be so intimate that the GVN would be reformed "from the bottom up" -- despite Diem.</p> <p>(Although Washington gave in -- or gave up -- on the kind and degree of pressure to exert on Diem, Washington did not soften on Lansdale. Despite four requests from Diem and the recommendations from Cottrell, the Taylor Report and William Bundy that Lansdale be sent to Saigon, he did not get there until late 1965.)</p>
11 Dec 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	<p>Two U.S. helicopter companies (33 H-21Cs, 400 men) arrived in Vietnam, the first direct U.S. military support for the GVN.</p> <p>ICC reaction: shall we continue functioning here in the face of U.S. assistance (increase barred by the Geneva Accords)?</p>
15 Dec 1961	<u>New York Times</u>	<p>Reported the formal exchange of letters between Kennedy and Diem announcing a stepped-up aid program for Vietnam.</p>

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## EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

### KENNEDY PROGRAM AND COMMITMENTS: 1961

#### IV.B.1.

#### CHAPTER I

##### I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1959, it was hard to find an American official worried about Vietnam. This was not because things were going well. They were not. A National Intelligence Estimate published in August portrayed Diem as unpopular, his economy as developing less rapidly than its rival in the North, and his government under pressure from guerrillas encouraged and in part supported from the North. Nevertheless, the NIE suggested no crisis then or for the foreseeable future. What the NIE called "harassment" (i.e., support for the VC) from the North would continue, but overt invasion seemed most unlikely. Neither communist nor anti-communist enemies within South Vietnam were seen as an immediate threat. Diem would remain as President, said the NIE, "for many years." In sum, the NIE saw the situation in Vietnam as unhappy, but not unstable. That was to be about as close to good news as we would hear from South Vietnam for a long time. 1/

From then on, the classified record through the end of 1961 shows a succession of bleak appraisals of the regime's support in the cities, and among the military, almost always accompanied by increasingly bleak estimates of increased VC strength and activity in the countryside. A dispatch from our Embassy in Saigon in March, 1960, described the situation in grave terms, but ended on the hopeful note that as of January Diem was recognizing his problems and promising to do something about them. 2/ In August, an NIE analysis reported a "marked deterioration since January." 3/ In November, a military coup barely failed to overthrow Diem.

In January, 1961 an old counterinsurgency hand, General Edward Lansdale, went to Vietnam to look things over for the Secretary of Defense. He returned with a report that "the Viet Cong hope to win back Vietnam south of the 17th parallel this year, if at all possible, and are much further along towards accomplishing this goal than I had realized from reading the reports received in Washington." 4/

Nevertheless, the situation was never seen as nearly so grave as these reports, read years later, might suggest. We will see that at least up until the fall of 1961, while appraisals of the situation sometimes suggested imminent crisis, the recommendations made to the President (by the authors of these frightening appraisals) always implied a less pessimistic view.

The top levels of the Kennedy Administration dealt only intermittently with the problem of Vietnam during 1961. There was a flurry of

of activity in late April and early May, which we will see was essentially an offshoot of the Laos crisis which had come to a head at that time. A much more thorough review was undertaken in the fall, following General Taylor's mission to Saigon, which then led to an important expansion of the American effort in Vietnam.

No fundamental new American decisions on Vietnam were made until the Buddhist unrest in the last half of 1963, and no major new military decisions were made until 1965. Consequently, the decisions in the fall of 1961 (essentially, to provide combat support -- for example, helicopter companies -- but to defer any decision on direct combat troops) have come to seem very important. This paper tries to describe what led up to those decisions, what alternatives were available and what the implications of the choices were.

The story is a fairly complicated one. For although it is hard to recall that context today, Vietnam in 1961 was a peripheral crisis. Even within Southeast Asia it received far less of the Administration's and the world's attention than did Laos. The New York Times Index for 1961 has eight columns of Vietnam, twenty-six on Laos. Decisions about Vietnam were greatly influenced by what was happening elsewhere. In the narrow Vietnamese context, the weaknesses and peculiarities of the Diem government had a substantial, if not always obvious, impact on the behavior of both the Vietnamese officials seeking American aid and the American decision-makers pondering the nature and terms of the aid they would offer.

As it happens, the Eisenhower Administration was never faced with a need for high-level decisions affecting the crisis developing in Vietnam during 1960. A formal Counterinsurgency Plan, intended to be the basis of an expanded program of assistance to Vietnam, was being worked on through most of that year, but (presumably reflecting a subdued sense of urgency), it took eight months to reach the White House. By that time, a new Administration had just taken office. President Kennedy promptly approved the plan, but this merely set off lengthy negotiations with the Vietnamese about whether and when they would do their share of the CIP. In late April, though, a crisis atmosphere developed, not because of anything fresh out of Vietnam, but because of a need to shore up the Vietnamese and others in Southeast Asia in the face of a likely collapse of the U.S. position in Laos. This led to a U.S. offer to discuss putting American troops into Vietnam, or perhaps negotiate a bilateral security treaty with the Vietnamese. When, however, Vice President Johnson mentioned the possibility of troops to Diem in May, Diem said he wanted no troops yet. The idea of a bilateral treaty similarly slipped out of sight. Consequently, although the United States had itself indicated a willingness in May to discuss a deeper commitment, the South Vietnamese did not take up the opportunity, and the Administration had no occasion to face up to really hard decisions.

But by October, the situation in Vietnam had worsened. The VC were becoming disturbingly aggressive. Now, Diem did raise the question of



a treaty. This request, coming after the American offer in May to consider such steps and in the context of a worsening situation in Vietnam, could hardly be ignored. The Taylor Mission and the Presidential review and decisions of November followed.

The present paper is organized around those natural climaxes in the policy process. The balance of Part I describes the situation inherited by the new Administration. Part II covers the period through the May peak. Part III covers the fall crisis.

## II. THE CONTEXT

In January, 1961, there were five issues that were going to affect American policy toward Vietnam. They turned on:

### 1. The VC Insurgency Itself

An illustration of the growth of the insurgency, but also of the limits of U.S. concern can be seen in the 1960 CINCPAC Command History. For several years prior to 1960, CINCPAC histories do not mention the VC insurgency at all. In 1960, the development of a counterinsurgency plan for Vietnam (and simultaneously one for Laos) received a fair amount of attention. But when, in April, MAAG in Saigon asked for additional transports and helicopters for the counterinsurgency effort, CINCPAC turned down the requests for transports, and OSD overruled the recommendation CINCPAC forwarded for 6 helicopters. By December, OSD was willing to approve sending 11 helicopters (of 16 newly requested) on an "emergency" basis. But the emergency was partly a matter of reassuring Diem after the November coup, and the degree of emergency is suggested by the rate of delivery: 4 in December, and the balance over the next three months. 5/

The record, in general, indicates a level of concern such as that illustrated by the helicopter decisions: growing gradually through 1960, but still pretty much of a back-burner issue so far as the attention and sense of urgency it commanded among policy-level officials. As we will see, the new Kennedy Administration gave it more attention, as the Eisenhower Administration undoubtedly would have had it remained in office. But it is important (though hard, now that Vietnam has loomed so large) to keep in mind how secondary an issue the VC threat to Vietnam seemed to be in early 1961.

### 2. Problems With the Diem Government

Yet, although the VC gains were not seen -- even in the dispatches from Saigon -- as serious enough to threaten the immediate collapse of the Diem government, those gains did have the effect of raising difficult questions about our relations with Diem that we had never had to face before. For by late 1960, it was a quite widely held view that the Diem government

was probably going to be overthrown sooner or ~~later~~, barring major changes from within. In contrast to the May 1959 NIE's confident statement that Diem "almost certainly" would remain president "for many years," we find the August 1960 NIE predicting that the recent "adverse trends," if continued, would "almost certainly in time cause the collapse of Diem's regime." 6/

The simple, unhappy fact was that whatever his triumphs in 1955 and 1956, by the end of the 1950s the feeling was growing that the best thing that could be said for Diem was that he was holding the country together and keeping it from succumbing to the communists. Once even this came into doubt, talk among Vietnamese and eventually among Americans of whether it might be better to look for alternative leadership became inevitable.

The sense of trouble shows through even among the optimists. We find Kenneth Young, U.S. Ambassador to Thailand and a strong believer in Diem, warning him in October, 1960 that "there seems to be somewhat of a crisis of confidence in Vietnam." 7/

But the long list of measures Young suggested were all tactical in nature, and required no basic changes in the regime.

Our Ambassador in Saigon (Eldridge Durbrow) was more pessimistic:

...situation in Viet-Nam December, 1960 is highly dangerous to US interests. Communists are engaged in large-scale guerrilla effort to take over country-side and oust Diem's Government. Their activities have steadily increased in intensity throughout this year. In addition, Diem is faced with widespread popular dissatisfaction with his government's inability to stem the communist tide and its own heavy-handed methods of operation. It seems clear that if he is to remain in power he must meet these two challenges by improvements in his methods of conducting war against communists and in vigorous action to build greater popular support. We should help and encourage him to take effective action. Should he not do so, we may well be forced, in not too distant future, to undertake difficult task of identifying and supporting alternate leadership. 8/

But the difficulties (and risks) of that task looked forbidding. During the November, 1960 coup attempt the U.S. had apparently used its influence to get the coup leaders to negotiate with Diem for reforms, allowing Diem to retain his position with reduced powers. Whether because of their own indecision or U.S. pressure, the coup leaders allowed a delay that let Diem bring loyalist troops in to regain control. (Three years



later, a leader of the November, 1963 coup "somewhat emphatically" told an American agent that "it would do no good to send anyone around to attempt to stop things, as happened in November, 1960.") 9/

The situation that was left -- with a number of American officials unhappy with Diem and doubtful that he was capable of winning the war, yet unwilling to risk a coup -- produced strains within the American government. Short of encouraging a coup, we seemed to have two alternatives: attempt to pressure Diem or attempt to so win his confidence that he would accept our advice willingly. The only effective form of U.S. pressure, however, was to withhold aid, and doing so would sooner or later weaken the war effort.

Consequently a division developed, mainly (but not purely) along the lines of Defense against State, about the advisability of using pressure. The division was particularly sharp since Diem seemed willing to go part way, at least, in meeting our military suggestions, so that the Defense view tended to be that the U.S. would be weakening the war effort if aid were withheld to seek to gain civil reforms that not many people in Defense regarded as crucial. Besides, it was argued, Diem would not succumb to pressure anyway. We would just encourage another coup, and the communists would exploit it.

Given this sort of argument, there would always (at least through 1961) be at least two layers to decisions about aid to Vietnam: What should the U.S. be willing to give? and What, if any, demands should be made on Diem in return for the aid?

### 3. Problems With the Soviets

But from Washington, both problems within Vietnam -- how to deal with the Viet Cong, and how to deal with Diem -- seemed quite inconsequential compared to the problems of dealing with the Soviets. There were two elements to the Soviet problem. The first, which only indirectly affected Vietnam, was the generally aggressive and confident posture of the Russians at that time, and the generally defensive position of the Americans. To use W.W. Rostow's terminology, the Soviets were then entering the third year of their "post-sputnik" offensive, and their aggressiveness would continue through the Cuban missile crisis. On the U.S. side there was dismay even among Republicans (openly, for example, by Rockefeller; necessarily subdued by Nixon, but reported by any number of journalists on the basis of private conversations) at what seemed to be an erosion of the American position in the world. The Coolidge Commission, appointed by the President, warned him in January, 1960, to, among other steps, "close the missile gap" and generally strengthen our defenses. Kennedy, of course, made erosion of our position in the world a major campaign issue. All of this made 1961 a peculiarly difficult year for Americans to make concessions, or give ground to the Soviets when it could be avoided, or even postponed. That was clear

in January, and everything thereafter that was, or could be interpreted to be a weak U.S. response, only strengthened the pressure to hold on in Vietnam. 10/

A further element of the Soviet problem impinged directly on Vietnam. The new Administration, even before taking office, was inclined to believe that unconventional warfare was likely to be terrifically important in the 1960s. In January 1961, Krushchev seconded that view with his speech pledging Soviet support to "wars of national liberation." Vietnam was where such a war was actually going on. Indeed, since the war in Laos had moved far beyond the insurgency stage, Vietnam was the only place in the world where the Administration faced a well-developed Communist effort to topple a pro-Western government with an externally-aided pro-communist insurgency. It was a challenge that could hardly be ignored.

#### 4. The Situation in Laos

Meanwhile, within Southeast Asia itself there was the peculiar problem of Laos, where the Western position was in the process of falling apart as Kennedy took office. The Eisenhower Administration had been giving strong support to a pro-American faction in Laos. As a consequence, the neutralist faction had joined in an alliance with the pro-communist faction. The Soviets were sending aid to the neutralist/communist alliance, which they recognized as the legitimate government in Laos; the U.S. recognized and aided the pro-western faction. Unfortunately, it turned out that the neutralist/communist forces were far more effective than those favored by the U.S., and so it became clear that only by putting an American army into Laos could the pro-Western faction be kept in power. Indeed, it was doubtful that even a coalition government headed by the neutralists (the choice the U.S. adopted) could be salvaged. The coalition government solution would raise problems for other countries in Southeast Asia: there would be doubts about U.S. commitments in that part of the world, and (since it was obvious that the communist forces would be left with de facto control of eastern Laos), the settlement would create direct security threats for Thailand and Vietnam. These problems would accompany a "good" outcome in Laos (the coalition government); if the Pathet Lao chose to simply overrun the country outright (as, short of direct American intervention, they had the power to do), the problem elsewhere in Southeast Asia would be so much the worse. Consequently, throughout 1961, we find the effects of the Laos situation spilling over onto Vietnam.

#### 5. The Special American Commitment to Vietnam

Finally, in this review of factors that would affect policy-making on Vietnam, we must note that South Vietnam, (unlike any of the other countries in Southeast Asia) was essentially the creation of the United States.



Without U.S. support Diem almost certainly could not have consolidated his hold on the South during 1955 and 1956.

Without the threat of U.S. intervention, South Vietnam could not have refused to even discuss the elections called for in 1956 under the Geneva settlement without being immediately overrun by the Viet Minh armies.

Without U.S. aid in the years following, the Diem regime certainly, and an independent South Vietnam almost as certainly, could not have survived.

Further, from 1954 on there had been repeated statements of U.S. support for South Vietnam of a sort that we would not find in our dealings with other countries in this part of the world. It is true there was nothing unqualified about this support: it was always economic, and occasionally accompanied by statements suggesting that the Diem regime had incurred an obligation to undertake reforms in return for our assistance. But then, until 1961, there was no occasion to consider any assistance that went beyond economic support and the usual sort of military equipment and advice, and no suggestion that our continued support was in doubt.

Consequently, the U.S. had gradually developed a special commitment in South Vietnam. It was certainly not absolutely binding, even at the level of assistance existing at the start of 1961, much less at any higher level the South Vietnamese might come to need or request. But the commitment was there; to let it slip would be awkward, at the least. Whether it really had any impact on later decisions is hard to say. Given the other factors already discussed, it is not hard to believe that in its absence, U.S. policy might have followed exactly the same course it has followed. On the other hand, in the absence of a pre-existing special relation with South Vietnam, the U.S. in 1961 possibly would have at least considered a coalition government for Vietnam as well as Laos, and chosen to limit direct U.S. involvement to Thailand and other countries in the area historically independent of both Hanoi and Peking. But that is the mootest sort of question. For if there had been no pre-existing commitment to South Vietnam in 1961, there would not have been a South Vietnam to worry about anyway.

### III. SUMMARY

Looking over the context we have been reviewing, it seems like a situation in which mistakes would be easy to make. The Viet Cong threat was serious enough to demand action; but not serious enough to compete with other crises and problems for the attention of senior decision-makers. A sound decision on tactics and levels of commitment to deal with the Viet Cong involved as much a judgment on the internal politics of non-communists in Vietnam as it did a judgment of the guerrillas' strength, and character, and relation with Hanoi. (Even a judgement that the war could be treated as a strictly military problem after all, involved at least an implicit judgement, and a controversial one, about Vietnamese politics.) Even if Diem

looked not worth supporting it would be painful to make a decision to let him sink, and especially so in the world context of 1961. Faced with a challenge to deal with wars of national liberation, it would be hard to decide that the first one we happened to meet was "not our style." And after the U.S. stepped back in Laos, it might be hard to persuade the Russians that we intended to stand firm anywhere if we then gave up on Vietnam. Finally, if the U.S. suspected that the best course in Vietnam was to seek immediately an alternative to Diem, no one knew who the alternative might be, or whether getting rid of Diem would really make things better.

Such was the prospect of Vietnam as 1961 began, and a new Administration took office.



## THE COUNTERINSURGENCY PLAN

### IV.B.

### CHAPTER II.

#### I. WINTER, 1961

The Vietnam Counter-Insurgency Plan which was being worked on through most of 1960 finally reached the White House in late January, apparently just after Kennedy took office. We do not have a document showing the exact date, but we know that Kennedy approved the main provisions of the Plan after a meeting on January 28th, and negotiations with Diem began February 13. 1/

The provisions of the CIP tell a good deal about how the Viet Cong threat looked to American and Vietnamese officials at the beginning of 1961, for there is nothing in the record to suggest that anyone -- either in Saigon or Washington, Vietnamese or American -- judged the CIP to be an inadequate response to the VC threat.

The U.S. offered Diem equipment and supplies to outfit a 20,000 man increase in his army. The cost was estimated at \$28.4 million. The U.S. also offered to train, outfit and supply 32,000 men of the Civil Guard (a counterguerrilla auxilliary) at a cost of \$12.7 million. These two moves would help Diem expand the RVNAF to a total of 170,000 men, and expand the Civil Guard to a total of 68,000 men. There were some further odds and ends totalling less than another million. The full package added up to less than \$42 million, which was a substantial but not enormous increment to on-going U.S. aid to Vietnam of about \$220 million a year. (Since most of these costs were for initial outfitting of new forces, the package was mainly a one-time shot in the arm.) 2/

For their part, the Vietnamese were supposed to pay the local currency costs of the new forces, and carry out a number of military and civil reforms.

The key military reforms were to straighten out the chain of command, and to develop an agreed overall plan of operations.

√The chain of command problem was that control of the counter-insurgency effort in the provinces was divided between the local military commander and the Province Chief, a personal appointee of Diem, and reporting directly to Diem. Even at a higher level, 3 regional field commands reported directly to Diem, by-passing the Chief of Staff. So a total of 42 officials with some substantial (and overlapping) control of the war effort reported directly to Diem: 38 Province Chiefs, 3 regional commanders, and the Chief of Staff. The "reform" eventually gotten from Diem put

the regional commanders under the Chief of Staff, and combined the office of Province Chief (usually a military man in any event) and local field commander. But the Province Chiefs still were personally responsible to Diem, and could appeal directly to him outside the nominal chain of command. Diem's reform, consequently, turned out to be essentially meaningless. His reluctance to move on this issue was not surprising. After all, the division and confusion of military authority served a real purpose for a ruler like Diem, with no broad base of support: it lessened the chance of a coup that would throw him out.

[The overall plan issue, on which not even a paper agreement was reached during the period covered by this account, was really an argument over strategy. It has a familiar ring.

[Diem seemed oriented very much towards maintaining at least the pretense of control over all of South Vietnam. Consequently, he favored maintaining military outposts (and concentrating the population in Agrovilles, the predecessors of the strategic hamlets) along "lines of strength" (generally main roads) which stretched throughout the country. To assert at least nominal control over the countryside between these lines of strength, the military forces would periodically organize a sweep. In contrast to this, the American plan stressed what MAAG called a "net and spear" concept. Small units would scour the jungles beyond the pacified area. When this "net" found an enemy unit, they would call in reserves (the spear) for a concentrated attempt to destroy the unit. As new areas were thus cleared, the net would be pushed further out into previously uncontested areas. It is not clear how well refined either concept was, or (with hindsight) whether the American plan was really a great deal more realistic than Diem's. But the American interest in getting Diem to agree to a plan does seem to have been primarily oriented to getting him to agree to some systematic procedure for using forces to clear areas of VC control, instead of tying up most of his forces defending fixed installations, with periodic uneventful sweeps through the hinterland.] 3/

On the civil side, the stress in the CIP was on trying to shore up the regime's support within the cities by such steps as bringing opposition leaders into the government, and giving the National Assembly the power to investigate charges of mismanagement and corruption in the executive.

The Plan also called for "civic action" and other steps to increase the change of winning positive loyalty from the peasants. 4/



A good deal of bureaucratic compromise had gone into the CIP. Ambassador Durbrow only reluctantly conceded any real need for the 20,000 man force increase. The stress on civil reforms, in particular on civil reforms as part of a quid pro quo, came into the plan only after the Saigon Embassy became involved, although there were general allusions to such things even in the original military draft of the CIP.

Nevertheless, there was at least a paper agreement, and so far as the record shows, substantial real agreement as well. No one complained the plan was inadequate. It would, "if properly implemented," "turn the tide." And, by implication, it would do so without any major increase in American personnel in Vietnam, and indeed, aside from the one-shot outfitting of the new units, without even any major increase in American aid. 5/

None of this meant that the warnings that we have seen in the Saigon Embassy's dispatches or in the August SNIE were not seriously intended. What it did mean was that, as of early 1961, the view that was presented to senior officials in Washington essentially showed the VC threat as a problem which could be pretty confidently handled, given a little more muscle for the army and some shaping up by the Vietnamese administration. Any doubts expressed went to the will and competence of the Diem regime, not to the strength of the VC, the role of Hanoi, or the adequacy of U.S. aid.

Consequently, among the assumptions listed as underlying the CIP, we find (with emphasis added):

That the Government of Viet-Nam has the basic potential to cope with the Viet Cong guerrilla threat if necessary corrective measures are taken and adequate forces are provided. 6/

That of course was the heart of the CIP bargain: the U.S. would provide support for the "adequate forces" if Diem would take the "necessary corrective steps." The hinted corollary was that our commitment to Diem should be contingent on his performance:

That at the present time the Diem government offers the best hope for defeating the Viet Cong. 7/

## II. LANSDALE'S REPORT

Running against these suggestions (of a firm bargaining position contingent on Diem's performance), was concern that if Diem were overthrown his successors might be no better; and that the VC might exploit the confusion and perhaps even civil war following a coup. Further, there was an argument that part of Diem's reluctance to move on reforms was that he was

afraid to make any concession that might weaken his grip: consequently the U.S. needed to reassure him that he could count on our firm support to him personally.

A strong statement of this point of view is contained in a report submitted in January by Brig. General Edward Lansdale, then the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Special Operations. Lansdale had become famous for his work in the Philippines advising on the successful campaign against the Huk insurgents. In 1955 and 1956, he was a key figure in installing and establishing Diem as President of South Vietnam. As mentioned in the Introduction, Lansdale visited Vietnam in early January. Here, from his report, are a few extracts on Diem and how Lansdale felt he should be handled:

...We must support Ngo Dinh Diem until another strong executive can replace him legally. President Diem feels that Americans have attacked him almost as viciously as the Communists, and he has withdrawn into a shell for self-protection. We have to show him by deeds, not words alone, that we are his friend. This will make our influence effective again.

...If the next American official to talk to President Diem would have the good sense to see him as a human being who has been through a lot of hell for years -- and not as an opponent to be beaten to his knees -- we would start regaining our influence with him in a healthy way. Whatever else we might think of him, he has been unselfish in devoting his life to his country and has little in personal belongings to show for it. If we don't like the heavy influence of Brother Nhu, then let's move someone of ours in close. This someone, however, must be able to look at problems with understanding, suggest better solutions than does Nhu, earn a position of influence....

Ambassador Durbrow should be transferred in the immediate future. He has been in the 'forest of tigers' which is Vietnam for nearly four years now and I doubt that he himself realizes how tired he has become or how close he is to the individual trees in this big woods. Correctly or not, the recognized government of Vietnam does not look upon him as a friend, believing he sympathized strongly with the coup leaders of 11 November.

...Ngo Dinh Diem is still the only Vietnamese with executive ability and the required determination to be an effective President. I believe there will be another attempt to get rid of him soon, unless the U.S. makes it clear that we are backing him as the elected top man. If the 11 November coup had been successful, I believe that a number of highly selfish and



mediocre people would be squabbling among themselves for power while the Communists took over. The Communists will be more alert to exploit the next coup attempt.... 8/

Lansdale's view was not immediately taken up, even though Hilsman reports that his presentation impressed Kennedy enough to start the President thinking about sending the General to Saigon as our next Ambassador. 9/ Instead, Kennedy made what was under the circumstances the easiest, least time-consuming decision, which was simply to let the Ambassador he had inherited from the Eisenhower Administration go forward and make a try with the plan and negotiating tactics already prepared.

Durbrow's guidance specifically tells him (in instructions he certainly found suited his own view perfectly):

...considered U.S. view (is) that success requires implementation entire plan...If Ambassador considers GVN does not provide necessary cooperation, he should inform Washington with recommendations which may include suspension U.S. contribution. 10/

### III. NEGOTIATING THE CIP

Kennedy's approval of the CIP apparently was seen as quite a routine action. None of the memoirs of the period give it any particular attention. And, although both Schlesinger and Hilsman refer to General Lansdale's report as shocking the President about the state of things in Vietnam, that report itself does not criticize the CIP, or the adequacy of its programs.

The guidance to Durbrow assumed agreement could be reached "within two weeks." This choice of language in the guidance cable implies that we believed Diem would quickly agree on the terms of the CIP, and the question of using pressure against him ("suspension of U.S. contribution") would only arise later, should he fail to follow through on his part of the agreement. 11/

As it turned out, Durbrow's efforts took a more complicated form. Even reaching a nominal agreement on the CIP took about 6 weeks. Then, Durbrow recommended holding up what is constantly referred to as "the green light" on increased aid until Diem had actually signed decrees implementing his major promises.

On March 8 (in response to a Washington suggestion for stepping up some aid prior to agreement on the CIP), Saigon cabled that:

...despite pressure of Embassy and MAAG, GVN has not decreed the required measures and will continue to delay unless highly pressured to act. 12/

But by the 16th both the MAAG Chief and the Ambassador were taking a gentler line. Durbrow's cable of that date reports that agreement on military reforms had reached a point "which MAAG considers it can live with provided GVN follows through with proper implementation." He was more concerned about the civil reforms, but nevertheless concluded the cable with:

Comments: Diem was most affable, exuded confidence and for first time expressed some gratitude our CIP efforts which he promised implement as best he could. Again before giving full green light believe we should await outcome detail discussion by GVN-US officials. In meantime MAAG quietly ordering some equipment for 20,000 increase. 13/

And a week later, Washington replied, agreeing that the "green light" should be held up until the CIP was approved, but also noting that since success depended on the willing cooperation of the Vietnamese, the Embassy ought not to push Diem too hard in the negotiations. 14/

Following this, the CIP negotiations dragged on inconclusively, and there is a ghostly quality to it all. There are cables giving encouraging progress reports which, in fact, seem limited to vague promises which, with hindsight, we know to have been quite meaningless. MAAG (and eventually the JCS in Washington) grew increasingly impatient with Durbrow's insistence on further holding up the "green light." They wanted to get on with the war.

By the end, Durbrow was simply holding out for Diem to actually complete the paperwork on some steps he had long ago said he intended to take. His very last cable (May 3) gives a good feeling for the flavor of the negotiations that had been going on between Diem and Durbrow for the nearly 3 months since the CIP talks began (and indeed it gives the flavor of Durbrow's relations with Diem at least since the previous October).

During the inauguration reception at Palace April 29, Diem took me aside and asked if I had given green light for US implementation of our part of counter insurgency plan (CIP). I replied frankly that I had not and noted that as stated in my letter of February 13 certain minimum actions must be taken by the GVN first if CIP is to produce results. I listed following actions: (1) Establishment of a central intelligence organization; (2) assignment of operational control for counter insurgency operations within military chain of command; and (3) implementation of reforms announced by Diem on February 6. Diem replied that he would do all these things, but that time was required to work out details. He said various GVN Cabinet members and Joint



General Staff studying proposals and have different ideas. Since he wants to be sure that whatever done is well thought out, will be successful and not have to be changed in future he letting responsible officials thoroughly consider proposals. Diem stated that Secretary Thuan working on detailed statute for central intelligence organization, but it required more work and needs to be polished up. I replied that frankly time was slipping by and as yet there no action on these three points, which essential before I can give "green light" on equipment for 20,000 increase in armed forces.

In connection Diem remarks, Vice President Tho told me April 28 that he had not seen CIP, although he had heard of its existence, and he does not believe other Ministers have seen it either. Question thus arises as to whether Diem's statement that various Cabinet members studying CIP refers only to Thuan. I gave Tho fairly detailed fill-in on CIP contents. Tho said action now by President, at least implementation of reforms, needed in order capitalize on present upswing in popular feeling about situation following GVN success in carrying out elections despite VC efforts to disrupt. Stating he did not know when if ever reforms will be implemented, he commented that failure take such action after so many promises would lose all momentum gained from elections. Tho added that, aside from psychological impact, reforms likely take (sic: make) little change unless Diem himself changes his method of operating. He noticed that if "super ministers" without real authority they likely become just additional level in bureaucracy without making GVN more effective.

On May 2 in course my formal farewell call I asked Diem if decrees yet signed on intelligence organization, chain of command and reforms. Diem stated he working on these matters but went through usual citation of difficulties including problem of convincing available personnel that they capable and qualified carry out responsibilities. He stated he already named Colonel Nguyen Van Yankee to head intelligence organization, Colonel Yankee has selected building for his headquarters and in process recruiting staff, while Secretary Thuan working on statute for organization. Re chain of command, I strongly emphasized that this one of most important factors in CIP, GVN must organize itself to follow national plan with one man in charge operational control and not waste time chasing will of wisps. Diem replied that he not feeling well (he has cold) and with inauguration he has not had time focus on this question but he will do it. He stated that he realizes only effective way is to place counter insurgency operations under Joint General Staff, but that his generals disagreed as to exactly how this should be done.

Diem, referring Sihanouk's Vientiane press conference (Vientiane's 1979), stated he did not believe there would be 14-nation conference and he afraid Laos almost lost already. Diem argued that since PL occupy almost all of southern Laos, we must agree increase in RVNAF to provide additional personnel to train self defense corps which in very bad shape.

Comment: Although Thuan has indicated to MAAG Chief General McGarr decree designating single officer to conduct counter insurgency operations being signed imminently, I asked him morning May 3 when seeing off Harriman and Lemnitzer whether I would receive before departure "present" he has long promised me. He replied presents often come when least expected, which apparently means Diem not yet ready sign decree.

While we should proceed with procurement equipment for 20,000 increase as recommended my 1606, I do not believe GVN should be informed of this green light, particularly until above decree signed. Durbrow. 15/

The February 6 reforms referred to involved a cabinet re-organization Diem had announced before the start of the CIP negotiations. The intelligence re-organization was to consolidate the 7 existing services. The chain of command problem has been discussed above. Diem finally issued decrees on all these points a few days after Durbrow went home. The decrees were essentially meaningless: exactly these same issues remained high on the list of "necessary reforms" called for after the Taylor Mission, and indeed throughout the rest of Diem's life.

#### IV. DURBROW'S TACTICS

Did Durbrow's tactics make sense? There is an argument to be made both ways. Certainly if Durbrow's focus was on the pro forma paperwork, then they did not. Mere formal organizational re-arrangements (unifying the then 7 intelligence services into 1, setting up at least a nominal chain of command for the war) often change very little even when they are seriously intended. To the extent they are not seriously intended, they are almost certain to be meaningless. Vice President Tho, of course, is cited in the cable as making exactly that point. The very fact that Durbrow chose to include this remark in the cable (without questioning it) suggests he agreed. But if squeezing the formal decrees out of Diem really did not mean much, then what was the point of exacerbating relations with Diem (not to mention relations with the military members of the U.S. mission) to get them? In hindsight, we can say there was none, unless the U.S. really meant what it had said about making U.S. support for Diem contingent on his taking "corrective measures." Then the function of those tactics would not have been to squeeze a probably meaningless concession from Diem; for the cable quoted alone makes it pretty clear that it would



have been naive to expect much follow-through from Diem. The purpose would have been to begin the process of separating U.S. support for Vietnam from support for the Diem regime, and to lay the basis for stronger such signals in the future unless Diem underwent some miraculous reformation. That, of course, is exactly the tack the U.S. followed in the fall of 1963, once the Administration had really decided that we could not go on with the Diem regime as it then existed.

All this can be said with hindsight. It is not clear how much of this line of thinking should be attributed to American officials in Washington or Saigon at the time. There is no hint in the cables we have that Durbrow was thinking this way. Rather he seems to have felt that the concessions he was wringing from Diem represented real progress, but that we would have to keep up the pressure (presumably with threats to suspend aid -- as his guidance considered -- even after the "green light" was given) to keep goading Diem in the right direction. Meanwhile, the predominant view (pushed most strongly, but hardly exclusively by the military) was that we should, and could effectively get on with the war with as much cooperation as we could get from Diem short of interfering with the war effort: it was all right to try for a quid pro quo on aid, but not very hard. The Lansdale view went even further, stressing the need for a demonstration of positive, essentially unqualified support for Diem if only to discourage a further coup attempt, which Lansdale saw as the main short-run danger.

In a significant way, Lansdale's view was not very different in its analysis of tactics from the view that Diem was hopeless. Both Lansdale, with his strong pro-Diem view, and men like Galbraith with a strong anti-Diem view, agreed that Diem could not be pressured into reforming this regime. ("He won't change, because he can't change," wrote Galbraith in a cable we will quote in more detail later.)

Where the Lansdale and Galbraith views differed -- a fundamental difference, of course, -- was in their estimate of the balance of risks of a coup. Lansdale, and obviously his view carried the day, believed that a coup was much more likely to make things worse than make things better. This must have been an especially hard view to argue against in 1961, when Diem did not look as hopeless as he would later, and when a strong argument could be made that the U.S. just could not afford at that time to risk the collapse of a pro-Western government in Vietnam. It must have seemed essentially irresistible to take the route of at least postponing, as seemed quite feasible, a decision on such a tough and risky course as holding back on support for Diem. The President, after all, could remember the charges that the Truman Administration had given away China by holding back on aid to Chiang to try to pressure him toward reform. As a young Congressman, he had even joined the chorus.

Meanwhile Durbrow was about to come home (he had been in Vietnam for 4 years); security problems in Vietnam were, at best, not improving;

and the repercussions of Laos were spilling over and would make further moves on Vietnam an urgent matter. By the middle of April, the Administration was undertaking its first close look at the problem in Vietnam (in contrast to the almost automatic approval of the CIP during the opening days of the new Administration).



THE SPRING DECISIONS - I

CHAPTER III

I. THE "PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM"

The development of what eventually came to be called "The Presidential Program for Vietnam" formally began with this memorandum from McNamara to Gilpatric:

20 April 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

This will confirm our discussion of this morning during which I stated that the President has asked that you:

- a. Appraise the current status and future prospects of the Communist drive to dominate South Viet-Nam.
- b. Recommend a series of actions (military, political and/or economic, overt and/or covert) which, in your opinion, will prevent Communist domination of that country.

The President would like to receive your report on or before Thursday, April 27.

During the course of your study, you should draw, to the extent you believe necessary, upon the views and resources of the State Department and CIA. Mr. Chester Bowles was present when the President discussed the matter with me, and I have reviewed the project with Mr. Allen Dulles. Further, the President stated that Mr. Walt Rostow would be available to counsel with you. 1/

Gilpatric, although obviously given a completely free hand under the terms of the memo, nevertheless set up an interagency task force to work on the report. A draft was ready April 26, and Gilpatric sent it to the President the following day. But this turned out to be only the first, and relatively unimportant phase of the effort. For the Laos crisis came to a boil just as the first Gilpatric report was finished, and the Task Force was continued with the essentially new mission of a recommending additional measure to keep our position from falling apart in the wake of what was happening in Laos. Consequently, to understand these late-April, early-May decisions, we have to treat separately the initial Gilpatric effort and the later, primarily State-drafted revision, dated May 6. The same general factors were in the background of both efforts,

although Laos was only one of the things that influenced the April 26 effort, while it became the overwhelming element in the May 6 effort. It is worth setting out these influencing factors, specifically:

1. The security situation in Vietnam.
2. The Administration's special interest in counter-insurgency.
3. The apparent futility and divisiveness of the Durbrow (pressure) tactics for dealing with Diem.
4. Eventually most important, and substantially narrowing the range of options realistically open to the Administration, the weakness of US policy in Laos, and the consequent strongly felt need for a signal of firm policy in Vietnam.

1. The Security Situation in Vietnam

The VC threat in Vietnam looked worse in April than it had in January. We will see that Gilpatric's report painted a bleak picture. Yet, there is no hint in the record that concern about the immediate situation in Vietnam was a major factor in the decision to formulate a new program.

VC strength was estimated at 3-15,000 in Lansdale's January memorandum; 8-10,000 in a March NIE; 10,000 in an April briefing paper (apparently by Lansdale) immediately preceding -- and recommending -- the Gilpatric Task Force; then 12,000 one week later in the Gilpatric report proper. VC incidents were reported high for April (according to the Task Force report, 650 per month, 4 times higher than January), but an upsurge in activity had long been predicted to coincide with the Vietnamese elections. As would happen in the future, the failure of the VC to prevent the elections was considered a sign of government strength. 2/

On the basis of the Task Force statistics, we could assume that the situation was deteriorating rapidly: taken literally, they indicate an increase in VC strength of 20 percent in about a week, plus the large increase in incidents. But neither cables from the field, nor the Washington files show any sense of a sharply deteriorating situation. And, as we will see, the initial Task Force Report, despite its crisis tone, recommended no increase in military strength for the Vietnamese, only more generous US financial aid to forces already planned under the CIP.

2. The Administration's Special Interest in Counter-insurgency

A more important impetus to the Gilpatric effort than any sense of deterioration in Vietnam seems to have been the Administration's general interest in doing something about counter-insurgency warfare, combined with an interest in finding more informal and more efficient means



of supervising policy than the Eisenhower Administration's elaborate National Security structure. The effort in Vietnam obviously required some coordination of separate efforts by at least State, Defense, CIA, and ICA (a predecessor of AID). Further, once a coordinated program was worked out, the idea appears to have been to focus responsibility for seeing to it that the program was carried out on some clearly identified individual. This search for a better way to organize policy seems to have been the principal motive behind the initial Gilpatric effort, although it became inconsequential after the original submission.

3. The Apparent Futility and Divisiveness of the Durbrow (Pressure) Tactics for Dealing With Diem

Late April was a peculiarly appropriate time to undertake the sort of sharpening up of policy and its organization just described. It was probably clear by then that Durbrow's pressure tactics were not really accomplishing much with Diem. Besides, Durbrow had been in Vietnam for four years by April, and a new Ambassador would normally have been sent in any event. Fritz Nolting had been chosen by early April, and he was scheduled to take over in early May. Further, Diem had just been reelected, an essentially meaningless formality to be sure, but still one more thing that helped make late April a logical time for taking a fresh look at US relations with Diem. And even to people who believed that a continuation of Durbrow's pressure tactics might be the best approach to Diem, events elsewhere and especially in Laos must have raised questions about whether it was a politic time to be threatening to withhold aid.

4. The Weakness of US Policy in Laos, and the Need for a Signal of Firm Policy in Vietnam

The situation in the world that April seemed to create an urgent requirement for the US to do something to demonstrate firmness, and especially so in Southeast Asia. The Task Force was set up the day after the Bay of Pigs invasion force surrendered, and at a time when the Laos crisis was obviously coming to head. There had been implicit agreement in principle between the US and the Soviets to seek a cease fire in Laos and to organize a neutral coalition government. But it was not clear at all that the cease-fire would come while there was anything left worth arguing about in the hands of the pro-Western faction. Gilpatric's initial Task Force report reached the President the day of a crisis meeting on Laos, and the more important second phase of the effort began then, in an atmosphere wholly dominated by Laos.

But even before the Laos crisis reached its peak, there was a sense in Washington and generally in the world that put strong pressures on the Administration to look for ways to take a firm stand somewhere; and if it was not to be in Laos, then Vietnam was next under the gun.

Something of the mood of the time can be sensed in these quotes, one from a March 28 NIE on Southeast Asia, another from Lansdale's notes, and finally a significant question from a Kennedy press conference:

From the NIE:

There is a deep awareness among the countries of Southeast Asia that developments in the Laotian crisis, and its outcome, have a profound impact on their future. The governments of the area tend to regard the Laotian crisis as a symbolic test of strengths between the major powers of the West and the Communist bloc. 3/

From Lansdale's notes (about April 21):

1. Psychological -- VN believed always they main target. Now it comes -- 'when our turn comes, will we be treated the same as Laos?' Main task GVN confidence in US. 4/

And suggesting the more general tone of the time (even a week before the Bay of Pigs, prompted by the Soviet orbiting of a man in space) this question at Kennedy's April 12 news conference:

Mr. President, this question might better be asked at a history class than at a news conference, but here it is anyway. The Communists seem to be putting us on the defensive on a number of fronts -- now, again, in space. Wars aside, do you think there is a danger that their system is going to prove more durable than ours. 5/

The President answered with cautious reassurance. Eight days later, after the Bay of Pigs, and the day he ordered the Task Force to go ahead, he told the Association of Newspaper Editors:

....it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies, or even nuclear armaments. The armies are there. But they serve primarily as the shield behind which subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advance, picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations that do not permit our own armed intervention.... We dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle. We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it -- whether in Cuba or South Vietnam. 6/ (Notice Kennedy's explicit assumption about US armed intervention as a means of dealing with insurgencies. Not too much can be read into his remark, for it probably was inspired primarily by criticism of his refusal to try to save the Bay of Pigs contingent. But the balance of the record adds significance to the comment.)



## II. THE APRIL 26 REPORT

The available Gilpatric file consists mostly of drafts of the report and memos from Lansdale. It contains a memorandum dated April 13, in which Lansdale advised Gilpatric of a meeting with Rostow, at which Rostow showed Lansdale a copy of a memorandum to Kennedy recommending a fresh crack at the Vietnam situation. Here is Rostow's memorandum:

April 12, 1961

### MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

FROM: WWR

Now that the Viet-Nam election is over, I believe we must turn to gearing up the whole Viet-Nam operation. Among the possible lines of action that might be considered at an early high level meeting are the following:

1. The appointment of a full time first-rate back-stop man in Washington. McNamara, as well as your staff, believes this to be essential.
2. The briefing of our new Ambassador, Fritz Nolting, including sufficient talk with yourself so that he fully understands the priority you attach to the Viet-Nam problem.
3. A possible visit to Viet-Nam in the near future by the Vice President.
4. A possible visit to the United States of Mr. Thuan, acting Defense Minister, and one of the few men around Diem with operational capacity and vigor.
5. The sending to Viet-Nam of a research and development and military hardware team which would explore with General McGarr which of the various techniques and gadgets now available or being explored might be relevant and useful in the Viet-Nam operation.
6. The raising of the MAAG ceiling, which involves some diplomacy, unless we can find an alternative way of introducing into the Viet-Nam operation a substantial number of Special Forces types.
7. The question of replacing the present ICA Chief in Viet-Nam, who, by all accounts, has expended his capital. We need a vigorous man who can work well with the military, since some of the rural development problems relate closely to guerrilla operations.

8. Settling the question of the extra funds for Diem.

9. The tactics of persuading Diem to move more rapidly to broaden the base of his government, as well as to decrease its centralization and improve its efficiency.

Against the background of decisions we should urgently take on these matters, you may wish to prepare a letter to Diem which would not only congratulate him, reaffirm our support, and specify new initiatives we are prepared to take, but would make clear to him the urgency you attach to a more effective political and morale setting for his military operation, now that the elections are successfully behind him.

Neither this memo, nor other available papers, give us a basis for judging how far the stress on the importance of Vietnam was already influenced by developments in Laos, and how much it reflects a separable interest in taking on the challenge of "wars of liberation." Both were undoubtedly important. But this Rostow memo turned out to be pretty close to an agenda for the initial Task Force report. It seems very safe to assume that the "full-time, first-rate, back-stop man in Washington" Rostow had in mind was Lansdale. (Gilpatric himself obviously could not be expected to spend full-time on Vietnam.) Presumably the President's request for the Gilpatric report was intended as either a method of easing Lansdale into that role, or at least of trying him out in it.

Following the description of the Rostow memo, Gilpatric's file contains several carbon copies of a long paper, unsigned but certainly by Lansdale, which among other things recommends that the President set up a Task Force for Vietnam which would lay out a detailed program of action and go on to supervise the implementation of that program. The date on the paper is April 19, but a draft must have been prepared some days earlier, probably about the time of Lansdale's discussion with Rostow on the 13th, since the available copies recommended that the Task Force submit its report to the President by April 21. The paper explicitly foresaw a major role for General Lansdale both in the Task Force, and thereafter in supervising the implementation of the report.

This Task Force was apparently intended to supersede what the paper refers to as "one of the customary working groups in Washington" which was "being called together next week by John Steeves, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs."

In view of all this, it is not surprising to find that the first phase of the Task Force effort appears, from the record, to have been very much a Gilpatric-Lansdale show. The first meeting of the group (which included State and CIA representatives) was apparently held April 24, four days after Gilpatric was told to go ahead. A draft report



was ready the 26th, following individual meetings between members and Gilpatric and Lansdale. Present files do not show whether there was another full meeting of the group before the first version of the report (dated April 26) was sent to the President on the 27th.

Here are the opening sections, which introduce the list of proposed actions which make up the program. 7/

## A PROGRAM OF ACTION TO PREVENT COMMUNIST DOMINATION OF

### SOUTH VIETNAM

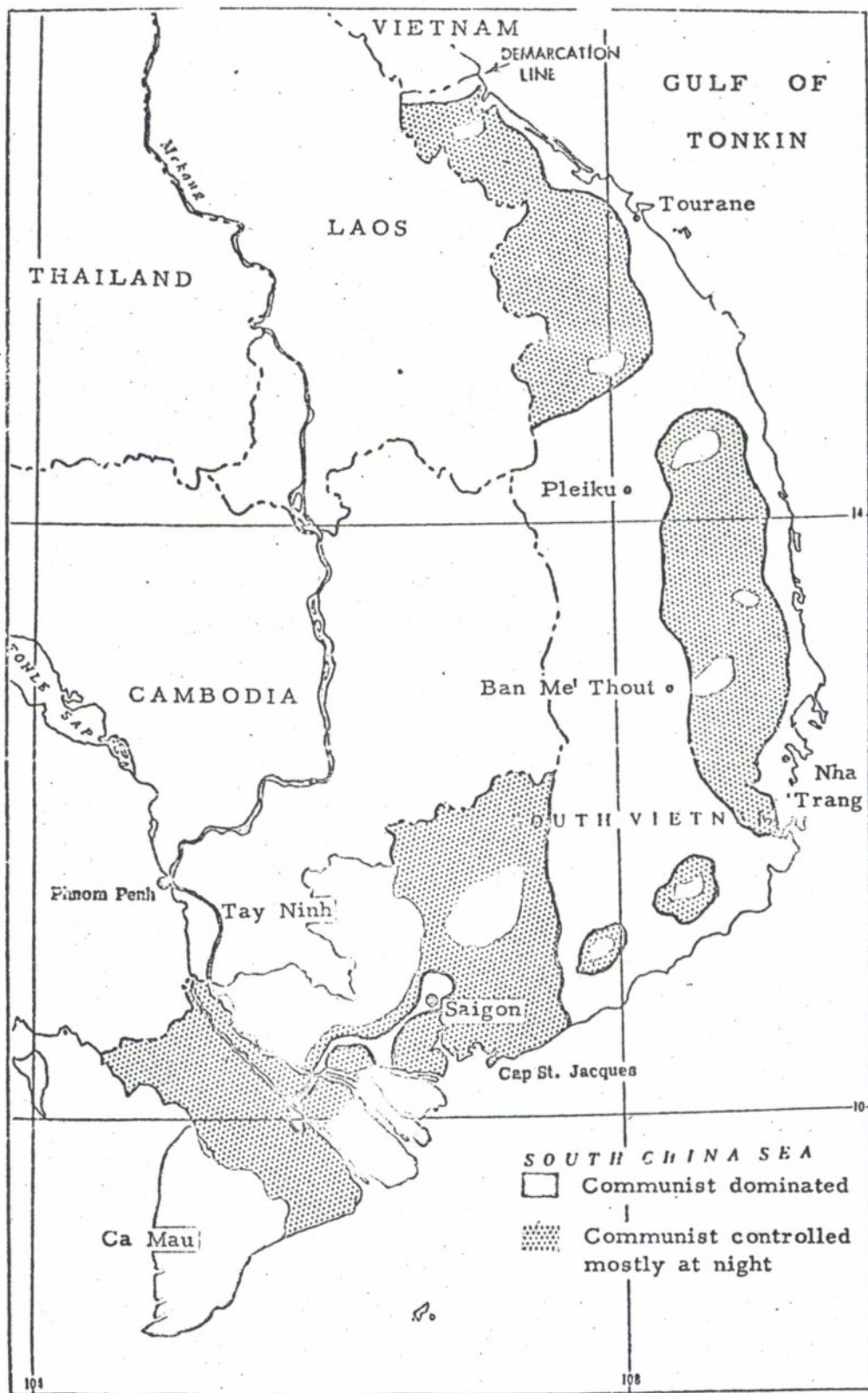
#### APPRAISAL OF THE SITUATION

After meeting in Hanoi on 13 May 1959, the Central Committee of the North Vietnamese Communist Party publicly announced its intention "to smash" the government of President Diem. Following this decision, the Viet Cong have significantly increased their program of infiltration, subversion, sabotage and assassination designed to achieve this end.

At the North Vietnamese Communist Party Congress in September 1960, the earlier declaration of underground war by the Party's Control Committee was reaffirmed. This action by the Party Congress took place only a month after Kong Le's coup in Laos. Scarcely two months later there was a military uprising in Saigon. The turmoil created throughout the area by this rapid succession of events provides an ideal environment for the Communist "master plan" to take over all of Southeast Asia.

Since that time, as can be seen from the attached map, the internal security situation in South Vietnam has become critical. What amounts to a state of active guerrilla warfare now exists throughout the country. The number of Viet Cong hard-core Communists has increased from 4,000 in early 1960 to an estimated 12,000 today. The number of violent incidents per month now averages 650. Casualties on both sides totaled more than 4500 during the first three months of this year. Fifty-eight percent of the country is under some degree of Communist control, ranging from harassment and night raids to almost complete administrative jurisdiction in the Communist "secure areas."

The Viet Cong over the past two years have succeeded in stepping up the pace and intensity of their attacks to the point where South Vietnam is nearing the decisive phase in its battle for survival. If the situation continues to deteriorate, the Communists will be able to press on to their strategic goal of establishing a rival "National Liberation Front" government in one of these "secure areas" thereby plunging the nation into open civil war. They have publicly announced that they will "take over the country before the end of 1961."





This situation is thus critical, but is not hopeless. The Vietnamese Government, with American aid, has increased its capabilities to fight its attackers, and provides a base upon which the necessary additional effort can be founded to defeat the Communist attack. Should the Communist effort increase, either directly or as a result of a collapse of Laos, additional measures beyond those proposed herein would be necessary.

In short, the situation in South Vietnam has reached the point where, at least for the time being, primary emphasis should be placed on providing a solution to the internal security problem.

The US Objective: To create a viable and increasingly democratic society in South Vietnam and to prevent Communist domination of the country.

Concept of Operations: To initiate on an accelerated basis, a series of mutually supporting actions of a military, political economic, psychological and covert character designed to achieve this objective. In so doing, it is intended to use, and where appropriate extend, expedite or build upon the existing US and Government of Vietnam (GVN) programs already underway in South Vietnam. There is neither the time available nor any sound justification for "starting from scratch." Rather the need is to focus the US effort in South Vietnam on the immediate internal security problem; to infuse it with a sense of urgency and a dedication to the overall US objective; to achieve, through cooperative inter-departmental support both in the field and in Washington, the operational flexibility needed to apply the available US assets in a manner best calculated to achieve our objective in Vietnam; and, finally, to impress on our friends, the Vietnamese, and on our foes, the Viet Cong, that come what may, the US intends to win this battle.

The program that followed this strongly worded introduction was very modest, not merely compared to current US involvement, but to the effort the US undertook following the Taylor Mission in the fall. The program is essentially simply a moderate acceleration of the CIP program approved in January, with a great deal of stress on vigor, enthusiasm, and strong leadership in carrying out the program.

In particular, the program proposes no increase in the Vietnamese army, and only a moderate (in hindsight, inconsequential) increase in the size of our MAAG mission. The main military measures were for the US to provide financial support for the 20,000-man increase in the RVNAF and to provide support for the full complement of counter-insurgency auxiliary forces (Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps) planned by Diem. Both were

modest steps. For under the CIP we were already planning to pay support costs for 150,000 men of the RVNAF and 32,000 men of the Civil Guard. This Task Force proposal, which had been urged for some weeks by MAAG in Saigon, simply said that we would provide the same support for all the Vietnamese forces that we had already planned to provide for most of them.

For the rest, the Presidential Program in its final form, issued May 19, turned out (after a great deal of stirring around) to be close to that proposed in the April 26 draft.

Two comments are needed on this material. First, the program Lansdale and Gilpatric proposed was not so narrowly military as the repeated emphasis on priority for the internal security problem might suggest. Rather, the emphasis was on stabilizing the countryside, in contrast to pressing Diem on political and administrative reforms mainly of interest to Diem's urban critics. This reflected both Lansdale's judgments on counter-insurgency, which look good in hindsight, and his strongly pro-Diem orientation, which looks much less good.

Second, the reference to a communist "master plan" for Southeast Asia (and similar language is found in a number of other staff papers through the balance of 1961) suggests a view of the situation which has been much criticized recently by men like Galbraith and Kennan. Public comments by those who were closely involved (both those critical of policy since 1965, such as Sorenson and Hilsman, and those supporting the Administration, such as William Bundy) suggest a more sophisticated view of the problem. Here we simply note that the formal staff work available strongly supports Galbraith and Kennan, although this does not necessarily imply that the senior members of the Administration shared the view that North Vietnam was operating (in the words of another staff paper) as the "implementing agent of Bloc policy" rather than in fairly conventional, mainly non-ideological pursuit of its own national interest. 8/

### III. LANSDALE'S ROLE

In his April 27 memorandum transmitting the Report to the President, Gilpatric noted that:

...in the short time available to the Task Force it was not possible to develop the program in complete detail. However, there has been prepared a plan for mutually supporting actions of a political, military, economic, psychological, and covert character which can be refined periodically on the basis of further recommendations from the field.

Toward this end, Brigadier General E.G. Lansdale, USAF, who has been designated Operations Officer for the Task Force, will proceed to Vietnam immediately after the program receives



Presidential approval. Following on the spot discussions with US and Vietnamese officials, he will forward to the Director of the Task Force specific recommendations for action in support of the attached program.

This appears to have been the high point of Lansdale's role in Vietnam policy

But none of this was to be. Present files contain a thermofax of McNamara's copy of the memorandum Gilpatric sent to the President. In McNamara's handwriting the words (Lansdale) "will proceed to Vietnam immediately" are changed to "will proceed to Vietnam when requested by the Ambassador." As we will see below, when the Task Force Report was re-drafted the next week, Lansdale's key role disappears entirely, at the request of the State Department, but presumably with the concurrence of the White House.

#### IV. KENNEDY'S APRIL 29 DECISIONS

Although our record is not clear, it appears that the cover memorandum was sent to the President as Gilpatric had signed it, and that McNamara's correction reflected a decision made after the paper went to the President, rather than a change in the language of the memo. In any event, at a meeting on April 29, President Kennedy approved only the quite limited military proposals of the draft report it transmitted. Decisions were deferred on the balance of the paper, which now included an annex issued April 28 on much more substantial additional military aid believed required by the situation in Laos. The military measures approved during this first go-around were:

- (1) Increase the MAAG as necessary to insure the effective implementation of the military portion of the program including the training of a 20,000-man addition to the present GVN armed

forces of 150,000. Initial appraisal of new tasks assigned CHMAAG indicates that approximately 100 additional military personnel will be required immediately in addition to the present complement of 685.

(2) Expand MAAG responsibilities to include authority to provide support and advice to the Self Defense Corps with a strength of approximately 40,000.

(3) Authorize MAP support for the entire Civil Guard Force of 68,000. MAP support is now authorized for 32,000; the remaining 36,000 are not now adequately trained and equipped.

(4) Install as a matter of priority a radar surveillance capability which will enable the GVN to obtain warning of Communist over-flights being conducted for intelligence or clandestine air supply purposes. Initially, this capability should be provided from US mobile radar capability.

(5) Provide MAP support for the Vietnamese Junk Force as a means of preventing Viet Cong clandestine supply and infiltration into South Vietnam by water. MAP support, which was not provided in the Counterinsurgency Plan, will include training of junk crews in Vietnam or at US bases by US Navy personnel. 10/

The only substantial significance that can be read into these April 29 decisions is that they signalled a willingness to go beyond the 685-man limit on the size of the US military mission in Saigon, which, if it were done openly, would be the first formal breach of the Geneva Agreements. For the rest, we were providing somewhat more generous support to the Vietnamese than proposed in the CIP. But the overall size of the Vietnamese forces would be no higher than those already approved. (The 20,000-man increase was already part of the CIP.) No one proposed in this initial draft that the Administration even consider sending American troops (other than the 100-odd additional advisors). It was not, by any interpretation, a crisis response.

Indeed, even if Kennedy had approved the whole April 26 program, it would have seemed (in hindsight) most notable for the "come what may, we intend to win" rhetoric in its introduction and for the supreme role granted to Task Force (and indirectly to Lansdale as its operations officer) in control of Vietnam policy. Lansdale's memoranda leave no real doubt that he saw the Report exactly that way -- which presumably was why he made no effort to risk stirring up trouble by putting his more controversial views into the paper. For example, although Lansdale believed the key new item in Vietnam policy was a need for emphatic support for Diem, only the barest hint of this view appears in the paper (and it is not even hinted at in Lansdale's preliminary draft of the report distributed at the April 24th meeting of the Task Force). 11/



That is when this opening phase of the Task Force effort has to be separated from what followed. As just noted, it was remarkable mainly for the strength of the commitment implied to South Vietnam, which the President never did unambiguously endorse, and for the organizational arrangement it proposed, with the key role for Lansdale and Gilpatric, which was eliminated from the later drafts. All of the factors behind the May reappraisal (cited at the beginning of this chapter) undoubtedly contributed to the decision to set up the Task Force. But Rostow's memorandum and the modest dimensions of the resulting proposals suggest the main idea really was to sharpen up existing policy and its administration, rather than to work out a new policy on the assumption that the existing program had become substantially obsolete. Immediately after April 27, this changes. Although Gilpatric and Lansdale continued to head up the Task Force through the Presidential decisions of May 11, their personal role became increasingly unimportant. The significance no longer was in putting new people in charge of a new style for running the program, but in developing a new program that would offset the impact of Laos.

#### V. THE LAOS ANNEX

On April 28, an annex had been issued to the basic report which went far beyond the modest military proposals in the original. The most reasonable assumption is that the annex was drawn up in response to comments at the April 27 NSC meeting at which the Report was to have been considered, but which turned out to be devoted to the by-then acute state of the crisis in Laos. On the grounds that the neutralization of Laos would solidify communists de facto control of eastern Laos (including the mountain passes which were the historic invasion route to southern Vietnam), the annex advocated U.S. support for a two-division increase in the RVNAF. To rapidly train these forces, there was now a recommendation on U.S. manpower commitments that dwarfed the previous recommendation for a MAAG increase: specifically, a 1600-man training team for each of the two new divisions, plus a 400-man special forces contingent to speed up counter-insurgency training for the South Vietnamese forces: a total of 3600 men, not counting the MAAG increase already authorized.

It is interesting that in the annex this force increase (and the bulk of the U.S. troop commitment) was specifically justified as insurance against a conventional invasion of South Vietnam. Some earlier drafts show the evolution of this concept. There is an alternate draft, apparently by Lansdale, which was not used but which recommended a U.S. troop commitment as reassurance to the Vietnamese of U.S. determination to stand by them. It did not recommend any increase in South Vietnamese forces. Instead, it stressed very heavily the damage to U.S. prestige and the credibility of our guarantees to other countries in Southeast Asia should we go through with the Laos settlement without taking some strong action to demonstrate that we were finally drawing a line in Southeast Asia.

Contrasting sharply with Lansdale's draft was the first draft of the paper that was finally issued. This was by Gilpatric's military aide, Col. E.F. Black. It concludes that South Vietnamese forces would have to be increased by two divisions, mainly to deal with threat of increased infiltration. Black stressed that the President would have to decide that the US would no longer be bound by the limitations of the 1954 Geneva Agreements (which Defense had long been lobbying against). But his paper recommends no substantial troop commitment. The reference to the Geneva Agreements apparently referred to a relatively modest increase in manpower beyond the 685-man ceiling, and to the introduction of new types of equipment not in Vietnam in 1954.

So the record contains three versions of the Annex -- Black's first draft, Lansdale's alternate draft, and then Black's revised paper, which was finally issued as the annex to the Report. The effect of considering them all is an odd one. The initial Black paper recommends an increase in Vietnamese forces to deal with the infiltration problem, but no substantial US troop commitment. The Lansdale alternative recommends a substantial US troop commitment, but no increase in Vietnamese forces. The final paper recommends both the RVNAF increase and the US troop commitments, but changes the reason for each: the reason for the RVNAF increase became a need for better protection against overt invasion, not an increased infiltration threat. And the reason for the US troop commitment became a desire to rapidly train the new Vietnamese troops, not for political reassurance. 12/

If taken literally, all of this implies an extraordinarily rapid series of reappraisals and reversals of judgment. But surely, the only realistic interpretation is that in this case (because a series of rough drafts happens to be included in the available file) we are getting a glimpse at the way such staff paperwork really gets drafted, as opposed to the much more orderly impression that is given if we saw only the finished products. Gilpatric (undoubtedly in consultation with at least McNamara, although the files do not show any record of this) was presumably interested primarily in what recommendations to make to the President, and secondarily in providing a bureaucratically suitable rationale for those recommendations. This rationale may, or may not, have coincided with whatever more private explanation of the recommendations that McNamara or Gilpatric may have conveyed to the President or people like McGeorge Bundy and Rostow on the White House staff. The lesson in this, which will not come as a surprise to anyone who has ever had contact with the policy-making process, is that the rationales given in such pieces of paper (intended for fairly wide circulation among the bureaucracy, as opposed to tightly held memoranda limited to those closest to the decision-maker) do not reliably indicate why recommendations were made the way they were.

## VI. THE MAY 1 REVIEW

Meanwhile, Kennedy, as noted earlier, did not act on the annex at the April 29 meeting when he approved the much more modest military proposals



of the basic Report. But on that day, there was a cable alerting CINCPAC to be ready to move 5000-men task forces to Udorn, Thailand, and to Touraine, (Da Nang), South Vietnam. Classified records available for this study do not explain this alert. But the public memoirs indirectly refer to it, and as would be expected, the alert was intended as a threat to intervene in Laos if the communists failed to go through with the cease fire which was to precede the Geneva Conference. Here is the cable:

From: JCS  
TO: CINCPAC  
INFO: CHMAAG VIENTIANE  
CHJUSMAAG BANGKOK THAILAND  
CHMAAG SAIGON VIETNAM

TOP SECRET JCS DA 995131 From JCS.

1. Request you prepare plans to move brigade size forces of approximately 5,000 each into Udorn or vicinity and into Tourane or vicinity. Forces should include all arms and appropriate air elements. Plans should be based solely on US forces at this time.
2. Decision to make these deployments not firm. It is expected that decision as to Thailand will be made at meeting tentatively scheduled here on Monday. Decision regarding Vietnam will be even later due to consideration of Geneva Accords.
3. It is hoped that these movements can be given SEATO cover but such possibility must be explored before becoming a firm element of your planning. State is taking action to explore this aspect.
4. Decision was not repeat not reached today concerning implementation of SEATO Plan 5/60.

The crisis in Laos was now at its peak. According to Schlesinger's account, reports reached Washington April 26 that the Pathet Lao were attacking strongly, with the apparent intention of grabbing most of the country before the cease-fire went into effect. At 10 p.m. that night, the JCS sent out a "general advisory" to major commands around the world, and specifically alerted CINCPAC to be prepared to undertake airstrikes against North Vietnam, and possibly southern China.

The next day -- the day the Task Force Report came to the President-- there were prolonged crisis meetings in the White House. The President later called in Congressional leaders, who advised against putting troops into Laos. Schlesinger quotes Rostow as telling him the NSC meeting that day was "the worst White House meeting he had ever attended in the entire Kennedy administration." 12a/

The Laos annex to the Gilpatric Report was issued on the 28th, in an atmosphere wholly dominated by the crisis in Laos. On the 29th, Kennedy's go-ahead on the Task Force's original military recommendations was squeezed into a day overwhelmingly devoted to Laos. This was the day of the cable, just cited, alerting CINCPAC for troop movements to Thailand and possibly Vietnam.

On May 1 (the Monday meeting referred to in the cable), Kennedy again deferred any decision on putting troops into Laos. According to available accounts, there is a strong sense by now (although no formal decision) that the U.S. would not go into Laos: that if the cease-fire failed, we would make a strong stand, instead, in Thailand and Vietnam. (On the 28th, in a speech to a Democratic dinner in Chicago, the President had hinted at this:

We are prepared to meet our obligations, but we can only defend the freedom of those who are determined to be free themselves. We can assist them -- we will bear more than our share of the burden, but we can only help those who are ready to bear their share of the burden themselves.) 13/

Reasonable qualifications, undoubtedly, but ones that seemed to suggest that intervention in Laos would be futile. On Sunday (the 30th), another hint came in remarks by Senator Fulbright on a TV interview show: he opposed intervention in Laos, and said he was confident the government was seeking "another solution."

So the decision anticipated Monday, May 1, in the JCS cable to CINCPAC was not made that day after all. But that day a new draft of the Task Force Report was issued. It contained only one significant change (other than blending the April 28 annex into the basic paper). The original draft contained a paragraph (under "political objectives") recommending we "obtain the political agreement [presumably from the SEATO membership] needed to permit the prompt implementation of SEATO contingency plans providing for military intervention in South Vietnam should this become necessary to prevent the loss of the country to Communism."

In the May 1 revision, the following sentence was added to the paragraph: "The United States should be prepared to intervene unilaterally in fulfillment of its commitment under Article IV, 2. of Manila Pact, and should make its determination to do so clear through appropriate public statements, diplomatic discussions, troop deployments, or other means." 14/ (The cited clause in the Manila (SEATO) Pact, which the paper did not quote,

If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other



than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.)

The May 1 draft also cleared up, or papered over, part of the confusion described earlier regarding the rationale for the military measures recommended in the Laos annex: the increased RVNAF force levels were attributed now both to concern over increased infiltration and to concern over overt invasion. But the US troop commitments are still described solely as for training, with no mention of the original political rationale.

## VII. STATE'S REDRAFT

Lansdale circulated the May 1 draft among the Task Force, with a note that comments should be in May 2, with a final Task Force review scheduled the morning of May 3, all in anticipation of an NSC meeting on the paper May 4.

George Ball, then Deputy Under Secretary of State, asked to postpone the meeting for a day. Lansdale sent Gilpatric a memorandum opposing the postponement. "It seems to me that George Ball could appoint someone to represent him at the meeting, and if he has personal or further comments they could come to us later in the day at his convenience." But Gilpatric delayed the meeting a day, and State produced a drastic revision of the paper. 15/

On the organizational issues, the State draft was brutally clearcut. It proposed a new version of the Gilpatric memorandum transmitting the Report, in which:

1. The paragraph (quoted earlier) describing Lansdale's special role is deleted.
2. A new paragraph is added to the end of the memorandum, in which Gilpatric is made to say: "Having completed its assignment...I recommend that the present Task Force be now dissolved."

Later sections of the paper were revised accordingly, giving responsibility for coordinating Vietnam policy to a new Task Force with George Ball as chairman. (In the final version, the Task Force has a State Department director, but no longer included Presidential appointees representing their departments. The whole Task Force idea had been downgraded to a conventional interagency working group. Although it continued to function for several years, there will be little occasion to mention it again in this paper.) 16/

State's proposal on organization prevailed. From the record available, the only thing that can be said definitely is that State objected,

successfully, to having an Ambassador report to a Task Force chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and with a second defense official (Lansdale) as executive officer. There may have been more to it. We know Lansdale's experience and his approach to guerrilla warfare initially won him a good deal of favor at the White House. But his memoranda suggest that his ideas on a number of issues (support for Phoumi in Laos, liberation of North Vietnam, essentially unqualified support for Diem in South Vietnam) went well beyond what the Administration judged reasonable. So it is quite possible that the President would have had second thoughts on Lansdale, aside from State's objections on bureaucratic grounds.

In any event, Lansdale's reaction to State's proposal on organization was to advise McNamara and Gilpatrick that:

My strong recommendation is that Defense stay completely out of the Task Force directorship as now proposed by State...Having a Defense officer, myself or someone else, placed in a position of only partial influence and of no decision permissibility would be only to provide State with a scapegoat to share the blame when we have a flop...The US past performance and theory of action, which State apparently desires to continue, simply offers no sound basis for winning, as desired by President Kennedy. 17/

But the final version of the Task Force Report, dated May 6, followed very closely the State revision submitted May 3, including the shift in control of the Task Force.

#### VIII. WIDENING THE OPTIONS

What is most striking about the revised drafts is that they excluded a tone of almost unqualified commitment to Vietnam, yet on the really important issues included qualifications which left the President a great deal of freedom to decide whatever he pleased without having to formally overrule the Task Force Report.

For example, the assertion (from the April draft) that the US should impress on friend and foe that "come what may, we intend to win" remained in the final paper. But this hortatory language is from the introduction; it described one of the effects the program in the balance of the paper was supposed to achieve, but did not ask the President to do or say anything not spelled out in the body of the paper. (We will see, when we come to the fall decisions, that the wisdom of an unqualified commitment to save Vietnam from Communism is treated afresh, with no suggestion that any such decision had already been made in May.)

On the other hand, the explicit recommendation in the Defense draft that we make clear our "determination...to intervene unilaterally...should this become necessary to save the country from communism..." was dropped. Instead, there is a recommendation for exploring a "new bilateral arrange-



ment" which might (the text is not explicit) extend to fighting the guerrillas, if that should become necessary to save the country, but also might only cover overt North Vietnamese invasion. 18/

Further, the need for these arrangements was now tied to the "loss" of Laos. The May 3 draft suggests we "undertake military security arrangements which establish beyond doubt our intention to stand behind Vietnam's resistance to Communism..." since "it is doubtful whether the Vietnamese Government can weather the pressures which are certain to be generated from the loss of Laos without prompt, and dramatic support for its security from the U.S." 19/

In the May 6 final draft, "establish beyond doubt" was toned down to "emphasize" and the flat reference to the loss of Laos was changed to "if Laos were lost." 20/

Similarly, the recommendations on the two new South Vietnamese divisions, and the two 1600-man US combat units to train them was described as a firm recommendation in the military section of the May 3 draft (which State left untouched from the Defense version), but were indirectly referred to as something for study in State's re-drafted political section. In the final paper, they were still firm recommendations in a military annex, but not in the main paper, where Defense was only described as studying this and other uses for US troops short of direct commitment against the guerrillas. US troop commitments were no longer recommended, only referred to as something "which might result from an NSC decision following discussions between Vice President Johnson /whose mission to Asia had been announced May 5/ and President Diem." 21/

Yet an interesting aspect of the State redraft is that, although its main impact was to soften the commitments implied in the Defense draft, a quick reading might give the contrary impression. We will see this same effect in the political sections to be discussed below. What seems to happen is that the very detail of the State treatment creates a strong impression, even though the actual proposals are less drastic and more qualified than those proposed by Defense. The contrast is all the sharper because the Defense draft leaned the other way. For example, the profoundly significant recommendation that the US commit itself to intervene unilaterally, if necessary, to prevent a Viet Cong victory in South Vietnam, is tossed into the Defense version most casually, with a reference to the Manila Treaty that makes it sound as if such a commitment, in fact, already existed.

In contrast, here is the State language referring to the proposed bilateral treaty (which in effect is a substitute for the Defense proposed unlimited unilateral commitment):

The Geneva Accords have been totally inadequate in protecting South Vietnam against Communist infiltration and insurgency. Moreover, with increased Communist success in Laos dramatic

US actions in stiffening up its physical support of Vietnam and the remainder of Southeast Asia may be needed to bolster the will to continue to resist the Communists. The inhibitions imposed on such action by certain parts of the Geneva Accords, which have been violated with impunity by the Communists, should not prevent our action. We should consider joining with the Vietnamese in a clear-cut defensive alliance which might include stationing of US forces on Vietnamese soil. As a variant of this arrangement certain SEATO troops might also be employed.

Bilateral military assistance by the United States pursuant to a request by South Vietnam along the lines of that undertaken during 1958 in response to the request by Lebanon for military assistance, would be in keeping with international law and treaty provisions. The provisions of the Geneva Accords of 1954, which prohibited the introduction of additional military arms and personnel into Vietnam, would not be a bar to the measures contemplated. The obvious, large-scale and continuous violation of these provisions of the Geneva Accords by North Vietnam in introducing large numbers of armed guerrillas into South Vietnam would justify the corresponding non-observance of these provisions by South Vietnam. Indeed, authorization for changing PEO Laos into an ordinary MAAG was justified on this legal theory. It should be recognized that the foregoing proposals require careful and detailed consideration and preparation particularly with regard to the precise mission of US forces used.

In addition to the previously cited advantages such an action might have at least two other important political and military advantages:

(a) It could release a portion of the ARVN from relatively static military functions to pursue the war against the insurgents and

(b) It would place the Sino-Soviet Bloc in the position of risking direct intervention in a situation where US forces were already in place, accepting the consequence of such action. This is in direct contrast to the current situation in Laos.

Alternatively, there are several potential political and military disadvantages to such an action, principal among these being:

(a) Some of the neutrals, notably India, might well be opposed, and the attitude of the UK and France is uncertain.

(b) This would provide the Communists with a major propaganda opportunity.

(c) The danger that a troop contribution would provoke a DRV/CHICOM reaction with the risk of involving a significant



commitment of US force in the Pacific to the Asian mainland. The French tied up some 200,000 troops during the unsuccessful Indo-China effort.

This might significantly weaken the Diem regime in the long run, having in mind the parallel of Rhee in Korea. 22/

This language is not solely the State Department's. In a Gilpatric memo to be cited shortly, we will see that the JCS, for example, had a hand in describing the role for US troops. Even so, the overall effect of the draft, as already noted, tones down very drastically the commitment implied by the May 1 Defense version:

1. The proposal is no longer for a unilateral, unlimited commitment to save Vietnam from communism. It only proposes consideration of a new treaty with South Vietnam (unlike the Defense draft which proposed reading a unilateral commitment into the existing Manila Treaty); and its purpose is to "bolster the will" of the South Vietnamese to resist the communists, not (as the Defense draft apparently meant) to guarantee that the US would join the war should the South Vietnamese effort prove inadequate.

2. It gives pro and con arguments for sending US troops, in contrast to the Defense draft which included a flat recommendation to send at least the 3600 men of the two division training teams and the special forces training team.

A reasonable judgment, consequently, is that State thought the Defense draft went too far in committing the US on Vietnam. (And in view of the positions he would take in 1965, George Ball's role as senior State representative on the Task Force obviously further encourages that interpretation.) But that is only a judgment. It is also possible to argue, in contrast, that perhaps State (or State plus whatever White House influence may have gone into the draft) simply was tidying up the Defense proposals: for example, that the redrafters felt that a new bilateral treaty would be a firmer basis for a commitment to save Vietnam than would reliance on a reinterpretation of the SEATO Treaty. Similar arguments can be made on the other points noted above.

Consequently, on any question about the intent of the redrafters, only a judgment and not a statement of fact can be provided.

But on the question of the effect of the redraft, a stronger statement can be made: for whatever the intent of the redrafters, the effect certainly was to weaken the commitments implied by the Defense draft, and leave the President a great deal of room for maneuver without having to explicitly overrule the recommendations presented to him.

## IX. THE TROOP ISSUE

To return to a question of judgement, it is difficult to assess how far this gradual hedging of proposals for very strong commitments to Vietnam simply reflected a desire (very probably encouraged by the White House) to leave the President freedom of action. To some extent it surely reflects a growing hope that perhaps the Laos cease-fire would come off; the country would not be flatly lost; and consequently, that the May 1 Defense draft, and even the May 3 State draft, reflected a somewhat panicky overestimate of how far we needed to go to keep Southeast Asia from falling apart. The two motives obviously overlapped.

There are indications that, as late as May 5, the estimate for saving something out of Laos remained bleak. On May 4, after a visit to the President, Senator Fulbright (who had opposed intervention in Laos along with other Congressional leaders) announced from the steps of the White House that he would support troop commitments to Thailand and Vietnam. An NSC meeting the following day (May 5) was devoted to discussing steps to reassure Vietnam and Thailand. Then in the afternoon, the President announced Vice President Johnson's visit to Asia at a press conference, which included this garbled exchange:

Q. Mr. President, there have been reports that you would be prepared to send American forces into South Vietnam if that became necessary to prevent Communist domination of that country. Could you tell us whether that is correct, and also anything else you have regarding plans for that country?

A. Well, we have had a group working in the government and we have had a Security Council meeting about the problems which are faced in Vietnam by the guerrillas and by the barrage which the present government is being subjected to. The problem of troops is a matter -- the matter of what we are going to do to assist Vietnam to obtain [retain?] its independence is a matter under consideration. There are a good many [issues?] which I think can most usefully wait until we have had consultations with the government, which up to the present time -- which will be one of the matters which Vice President Johnson will deal with; the problem of consultations with the Government of Vietnam as to what further steps could most usefully be taken. 23/

On May 8, the reconstituted International Control Commission (established by the Geneva Agreement of 1954) arrived in Laos, hoping to supervise a cease-fire. The cease-fire had been agreed to in principle by both sides as early as May 1. The question was whether the Pathet Lao



would really stop advancing. Aside from American intervention, a ceasefire was the only hope of the larger, but less effective, pro-Western forces led by Phoumi. Certainly hopes were higher by the 8th than they were a week earlier, but this might not be saying much. The documentary record is ambiguous. The final draft of the letter Vice President Johnson would deliver to Diem was dated May 8, and in this letter Kennedy did not go much beyond the proposals in the April 27 version of the task force report. There was no mention of U.S. troop commitments, nor of a bilateral treaty. Even on the question of a further increase (beyond 170,000) in the RVNAF, Kennedy promised Diem only that this will be "considered carefully with you, if developments should so warrant." 24/

But the same day, Gilpatric sent a memo to the JCS asking their views on U.S. troops in Vietnam:

... In preparation for the possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam, it is desired that you give further review and study of the military advisability of such action, as well as to the size and composition of such U.S. forces. Your views, which I hope could include some expression from CINCPAC, would be valuable for consideration prior to the NSC meeting this week (currently scheduled for Friday, May 12). 25/

This in turn was based on a statement in the May 6 Task Force draft, which said that such a study was being carried out, with particular consideration being given to deploying to South Vietnam

...two U.S. battle groups (with necessary command and logistics units), plus an engineer (construction-combat) battalion. These units would be located in the 'high plateau' region, remote from the major population center of Saigon-Cholon, under the command of the Chief, MAAG. To help accelerate the training of the G.V.N. army, they would establish two divisional field training areas. The engineer battalion would undertake construction of roads, air-landing strips and other facilities essential to the logistical support of the U.S. and Vietnamese forces there.

The purpose of these forces (again, from the May 6 draft) would be to

...provide maximum psychological impact in deterrence of further Communist aggression from North Vietnam, China, or the Soviet Union, while rallying the morale of the Vietnamese and encouraging the support of SEATO and neutral nations for Vietnam's defense;

- release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counterinsurgency actions;
- provide maximum training to approved Vietnamese forces; and
- provide significant military resistance to potential North Vietnam Communist and/or Chinese Communist action. 26/

The JCS reply, dated May 10, deferred details on the composition of U.S. forces, but quite emphatically recommended that we do send them, "assuming the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the communist sphere." Here is the JCS memo:

In considering the possible commitment of U.S. forces to South Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the overall critical situation in Southeast Asia with particular emphasis upon the present highly flammable situation in South Vietnam. In this connection the question, however, of South Vietnam should not be considered in isolation but rather in conjunction with Thailand and their overall relationship to the security of Southeast Asia. The views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the question regarding the deployment of U.S. forces into Thailand were provided to you by JCSM-311-61, dated 9 May 1961. The current potentially dangerous military and political situation in Laos, of course, is the focal point in this area. Assuming that the political decision is to hold Southeast Asia outside the Communist sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are of the opinion that U.S. forces should be deployed immediately to South Vietnam; such action should be taken primarily to prevent the Vietnamese from being subjected to the same situation as presently exists in Laos, which would then require deployment of U.S. forces into an already existing combat situation.

In view of the foregoing, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that the decision be made to deploy suitable U.S. forces to South Vietnam. Sufficient forces should be deployed to accomplish the following purposes:

Provide a visible deterrent to potential North Vietnam and/or Chinese Communist action;



Release Vietnamese forces from advanced and static defense positions to permit their fuller commitment to counterinsurgency actions;

Assist in training the Vietnamese forces to the maximum extent possible consistent with their mission;

Provide a nucleus for the support of any additional U.S. or SEATO military operation in Southeast Asia; and

Indicate the firmness of our intent to all Asian nations.

In order to maintain U.S. flexibility in the Pacific, it is envisioned that some or all of the forces deployed to South Vietnam would come from the United States. The movement of these troops could be accomplished in an administrative manner and thus not tax the limited lift capabilities of CINCPAC.

In order to accomplish the foregoing the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

President Diem be encouraged to request that the United States fulfill its SEATO obligation, in view of the new threat now posed by the Laotian situation, by the immediate deployment of appropriate U.S. forces to South Vietnam;

Upon receipt of this request, suitable forces could be immediately deployed to South Vietnam in order to accomplish the above-mentioned purpose. Details of size and composition of these forces must include the views of both CINCPAC and CHMAAG which are not yet available. 27/

The NSC meeting that dealt with the Task Force Report was held the next day (the 11th, rather than the 12th as originally anticipated). The President avoided committing himself on the troop issue any further than he had already been committed by the time of his May 5 press conference. The resulting NSAM 52 (signed by McGeorge Bundy) states only that:

The President directs full examination by the Defense Department under the guidance of the Director of the

continuing Task Force on Vietnam, of the size and composition of forces which would be desirable in the case of a possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam." 28/  
(The Task Force Director at this point referred to Sterling Cottrell, a Foreign Service Officer, rather than to Gilpatric).

So the President went no further, really, than to take note of a study that was already well underway. The record does not help us judge what significance to attach to the qualification that the study be done under the guidance of the State Department officer now heading the Task Force.

On other issues relating to our military commitments the President again, with minor alterations, endorsed the proposals of the May 6 draft. On the question of a formal alliance with South Vietnam NEA: 52 reports that:

The Ambassador is authorized to begin negotiations looking toward a new bilateral arrangement with Vietnam, but no firm commitment will be made to such an arrangement without further review by the President.

The President also "confirmed" the decisions quoted earlier accepting the April 27 military recommendations, and accepted the following further recommendations (all from the May 6 report) "with the objective of meeting the increased security threat resulting from the new situation along the frontier between Laos and Vietnam."

1. Assist the G.V.N. armed forces to increase their border patrol and insurgency suppression capabilities by establishing an effective border intelligence and patrol system, by instituting regular aerial surveillance over the entire frontier area, and by applying modern technological area-denial techniques to control the roads and trails along Vietnam's borders. A special staff element (approximately 6 U.S. personnel), to concentrate upon solutions to the unique problems of Vietnam's borders, will be activated in MAAG, Vietnam, to assist a similar special unit in the RVNAF which the G.V.N. will be encouraged to establish; these two elements working as an integrated team will help the G.V.N. gain the support of nomadic tribes and other border inhabitants, as well as introduce advanced techniques and equipment to strengthen the security of South Vietnam's frontiers.

2. Assist the G.V.N. to establish a Combat Development and Test Center in South Vietnam to develop, with the help of



modern technology, new techniques for use against the Viet Cong forces (approximately 4 U.S. personnel).

3. Assist the G.V.N. forces with health, welfare and public work projects by providing U.S. Army civic action mobile training teams, coordinated with the similar civilian effort (approximately 14 U.S. personnel).

4. Deploy a Special Forces Group (approximately 400 personnel) to Nha Trang in order to accelerate G.V.N. Special Forces training. The first increment, for immediate deployment to Vietnam, should be a Special Forces company (52 personnel).

5. Instruct JCS, CINCPAC, and MAAG to undertake an assessment of the military utility of a further increase in the G.V.N. forces from 170,000 to 200,000 in order to create two new division equivalents for deployment to the northwest border region. The parallel political and fiscal implications should be assessed. 29/

In general Kennedy did not seem to have committed the U.S., by these decisions, significantly further than the U.S. had already been committed by the President's public speeches and remarks at press conferences. In the expanded military aid program approved by the President, there was no item that committed the U.S. any further than we had gone in the case of Laos (that is, beyond providing advisors, materiel, and some covert combat assistance).

A debatable exception was the decision to send 400 special forces troops to speed training of their South Vietnamese counterparts. The idea of sending some Green Berets antedates the Task Force effort. Rostow mentioned it in his April 12 memo, quoted above. It can be argued whether it was really prudent to view this decision as separable from the "combat troops" issue (which also were being considered nominally, at least, for training, not necessarily combat). But obviously the President was sold on their going, and since the Vietnamese Special Forces were themselves supported by CIA rather than the regular military aid program, it was possible to handle these troops covertly. In any event, although there would eventually be 1200 Green Berets in Vietnam (before the first commitment of U.S. combat units) they were apparently never cited as a precedent for or a commitment to a more overt role in the war.

These, then, were the measures relating to military commitments undertaken as a result of the April/May review. The principal objective of these measures (together with the non-military elements of the program) as stated in the Task Force report, and formally adopted in the NSAM, was "to prevent Communist domination of Vietnam." There was no uncertainty about why these

steps were taken: quite aside from the Administration's strong feelings that we had to deal with the challenge of wars of national liberation, the program adopted seems quite minimal as a response to what was -- even after the cease-fire was confirmed -- a serious setback in Laos. No one in the government, and no one of substantial influence outside it, questioned the need for some action to hold things together in Southeast Asia.

For the fact was that our stake in Vietnam had increased because of what had been happening in Laos, quite aside from anything that we did or said. Collapse in Vietnam would be worse after Laos than it might have seemed before. And to do nothing after Laos would not really have made the U.S. look better if Vietnam fell; it would only have increased the likelihood both that that would happen, and greatly increased the extent to which the U.S. (and within U.S. politics, the Kennedy Administration) would be blamed for the collapse.

The Laotian situation did not even provide, then, a precedent for seeking to settle the Vietnamese situation through the same coalition government route. For in Laos, the pro-U.S. faction was plainly being defeated militarily in open battle despite a good deal of U.S. aid. The only U.S. alternative to accepting the coalition solution was to take over the war ourselves. Further, there was a strong neutralist faction in Laos, which could provide a premier for the government and at least a veneer of hope that the settlement might be something more than a face-saving way of handing the country over to the communist faction.

Neither of these conditions held for Vietnam, aside from all the other factors reviewed in the introduction to this paper which left the Administration no realistic option in the neutralist direction, even assuming that there was any temptation at that time to move in that direction. To have simply given up on Vietnam at that point, before any major effort had been attempted to at least see if the situation could be saved at reasonable cost, seems to have been, even with the hindsight we now have, essentially out of the question.

That is why, in the context of the time, the commitments Kennedy actually made seem like a near-minimal response which avoided any real deepening of our stake in Vietnam.

There is far more of a problem with the things that we decided to talk about (troops, and a formal treaty with Vietnam) than with the measures Kennedy fully endorsed. Certainly putting troops into Vietnam would increase our stake in the outcome, rather than merely help protect the stake we already had. So, surely, would a formal treaty, even if the treaty nominally required U.S. support only in the case of overt invasion. How much so would depend on the nature of the troop commitments and the nature of the treaty. But, as we will see in the next chapter (in reviewing Vice President Johnson's visit) Diem turned out to want neither troops nor a treaty for the time being. And so these issues were deferred until the fall.



Aside from questions relating to our commitments to Vietnam, there were also the parallel questions relating to our commitment, if any, to Diem. As noted in the introduction, discussions about Vietnam always had this dual aspect, and this part of the problem was treated with increasing explicitness as time went on (and as the Administration got to know Diem better). In the CIP, it was treated essentially by implication. In the Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of April 26, it was also handled that way: no explicit statement of a change in our relations with Diem was offered, although by implication it was there.

Where the CIP (by implication) saw our increased aid as contingent on Diem's performance, the April 26 program left out any suggestion of a quid pro quo. To the contrary, it simply states that "those portions of the plan which are agreed to by the G.V.N. will be implemented as rapidly as possible."

And where the CIP saw Diem's government as our best hope "at the present time" this note of limited commitment to Diem is dropped in the April 26 draft. Instead we have a bland statement that we will "assist the GVN under President Diem to develop within the country the widest consensus of public support for a government dedicated to resisting communist domination." [emphasis added] 30/

The May 3 State draft and the May 6 final draft dealt with this issue much as they had with the questions of military commitments: that is, these did not so much conspicuously weaken the proposals of the Gilpatric/Lansdale version, as to qualify and elaborate on them in ways that in effect (again, we cannot make a statement on intent) left the President a ready option to reconsider his position. State explicitly asserted that we were changing our policy on Diem, and spelled out some reasons for doing so.

Here are some extracts from the May 6 final draft; (the language is essentially the same in the May 3 draft).

...we must continue to work through the present Vietnamese government despite its acknowledged weakness. No other remotely feasible alternative exists at this point in time which does not involve an unacceptable degree of risk...Diem is not now fully confident of United States support. This confidence has been undermined partly by our vigorous efforts to get him to mend his ways, and partly by the equivocal attitude he is convinced we took at the time of the November 11, 1960, attempted coup. It is essential that President Diem's full confidence in and communication with the United States be restored promptly...Given Diem's personality and character and the abrasive nature of our recent

relationships, success or failure in this regard will depend very heavily on Ambassador Nolting's ability to get on the same wavelength with Diem...

The chief threat to the viability of President Diem's administration is, without a doubt, the fact of communist insurgency and the government's inability to protect its own people. Thus military measures must have the highest priority. There is, nevertheless, strong discontent with the government among not only the elite but among peasants, labor, and business. Criticism focuses on the dynastic aspects of the Diem rule, on its clandestine political apparatus, and on the methods through which the President exercises his leadership. This is aggravated by Communist attempts to discredit the President and weaken his government's authority. All this is made the easier because of a communications void existing between the government and the people. For many months United States efforts have been directed toward persuading Diem to adopt political, social, and economic changes designed to correct this serious defect. Many of these changes are included in the Counterinsurgency Plan. Our success has been only partial. There are those who consider that Diem will not succeed in the battle to win men's minds in Vietnam.

Thus in giving priority emphasis to the need for internal security, we must not relax in our efforts to persuade Diem of the need for political social and economic progress. If his efforts are inadequate in this field our overall objective could be seriously endangered and we might once more find ourselves in the position of shoring a leader who had lost the support of his people. 31/

Although the paper expresses the hope that through "very astute dealings" ("a combination of positive inducements plus points at which discreet pressure can be exercised") Diem could be successfully worked with, the net effect of the State draft is hardly enthusiastic. The paper tells the President that his Task Force "believes" that the policy will work. But it is a large order: for the aim had been referred to as nothing less than "a major alteration in the present government structure or in its objectives."

In effect, the silence on Diem in the Gilpatric/Lansdale draft was replaced by a detailed statement which, in the course of reaffirming the need to take prompt steps to show confidence in Diem, nevertheless leaves the strong impression that we really did not have much confidence in him at all. Support for Diem became tactical: based explicitly on the hope that he might reform, and implicitly on the fact that trying to overthrow him would



be terribly risky in the aftermath of Laos, even if the U.S. had someone to overthrow him with. Further, although the paper explicitly conceded first priority to military needs, there was a strong argument that military efforts alone will not be enough.

It was apparently this equivocal attitude toward Diem (aside from any personal considerations) that led to Lansdale's prediction that State could never "win this battle." Thus in the main paper of the May 6 draft the general political objective was stated as:

Develop political and economic conditions which will create a solid and widespread support among the key political groups and the general population for a Vietnam which has the will to resist Communist encroachment and which in turn stems from a stake in a freer and more democratic society. 32/

Lansdale, in a pencilled comment to Gilpatric, complained:

The elected President of Vietnam is ignored in this statement as the base to build upon in countering the communists. This will have the U.S. pitted against Diem as first priority, the communists as second. 33/

Nevertheless, it seems that the May program went a very long way in Lansdale's preferred direction: although the U.S. was expanding its contribution to the Vietnamese effort it was no longer asking for any quid pro quo. The U.S. envisioned "discreet pressure" but certainly not, for then anyway, any hint of withholding aid. The U.S. flatly asserted that it saw no "remotely acceptable alternative to Diem," for the time being, anyway. The U.S. thought it vital that Diem do better, but increasing his confidence in the U.S. had top priority. The strongest guidance given the new Ambassador was to "get on Diem's wavelength." 34/

More of this tentative adoption of the Lansdale approach can be seen in the discussion of Vice President Johnson's trip (from the May 6 draft):

The Vice President's visit will provide the added incentive needed to give the GVN the motivation and confidence it needs to carry on the struggle. We believe that meetings between the Vice President and President Diem will act as a catalytic agent to produce broad agreement on the need for accelerated joint Vietnamese-U.S. actions to resist Communist encroachment in SEA. These meetings will also serve to get across to President Diem our confidence in him as a man of great stature and as one of the strong figures in SEA on whom we are placing our reliance. At the same time, these conferences should impress Diem with the degree of importance

we attach to certain political and economic reforms in Vietnam which are an essential element in frustrating Communist encroachments. Recognizing the difficulties we have had in the past in persuading Diem to take effective action on such reforms, as specific an understanding as possible should be solicited from Diem on this point.

It was this sort of guidance (plus, perhaps, a memo from Lansdale describing President Diem in terms that bear comparison with those Jack Valenti would later use in connection with another President) that accounts for Johnson's famous reference to Diem as the Churchill of Asia. 35/

In sum, what emerges from the final version of the report is a sense that the U.S. had decided to take a crack at the Lansdale approach of trying to win Diem over with a strong display of personal confidence in him. What does not emerge is any strong sense that the Administration believed this new approach really had much hope of working, but undoubtedly this pessimistic reading is influenced by the hindsight now available. The drafters of the paper very probably saw themselves as hedging against the possible failure of the policy, rather than implying that it probably would not work.

If we go beyond the paperwork, and ask what judgments might be made about the intent of the senior decision-makers, and particularly the President, it seems that here, even more than in connection with the military commitments discussed earlier, the Administration adopted a course which, whether in hindsight the wisest available or not, probably seemed to have no practical alternative.

Presumably the top level of the Administration believed there was at least some chance that the new policy toward Diem might produce useful results.

But even to the extent this prospect seemed dim, there were political advantages (or at least political risks avoided) in giving this plan a try, and there must not have seemed (as even now there does not seem) to have been much cost in doing so.

Finally, whatever the President thought of the prospects and political advantages of this approach to Diem, it might have been hard at that time to see any drastically different alternative anyway. After all, the heart of the Laos embarrassment was that the U.S. was (with some face-saving cover) dropping an anti-communist leader who had come into power with the indispensable assistance of the U.S. This dropping of Phoumi in Laos in favor of support for the neutralist government Phoumi had overthrown with U.S. encouragement and assistance remained an essential part of whatever outcome developed in Laos. In the wake of this embarrassment, the U.S. was



now trying to reassure other governments in Southeast Asia. Was it possible to carry out this reassurance while threatening Diem, another anti-communist leader totally dependent on U.S. support, with withdrawal of our support (our only available form of pressure) unless he reformed himself according to U.S. prescription? Was this a prudent time to risk a coup in South Vietnam, which was the widely predicted effect of any show of lack of confidence in Diem?

It is obviously impossible for us to strike a balance among these reasons (or perhaps some others) why the decisions were made the way they were. More interesting, though, is that it seems to have been unnecessary for even the decision-maker himself to strike such a balance. For it seems that whatever his view, the policy of trying to reassure Diem (rather than pressure him, or dissociating from him) seemed like a sensible tactic for the moment, and very possibly the only sensible tactic for that particular moment.

CHAPTER IV

At the end of September, Admiral Harry Felt, Commander-in-Chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific, stopped off in Saigon on his way to a SEATO meeting in Bangkok. Felt, Ambassador Nolting, and several of their senior aides met with Diem at Independence Palace, on the evening of the 29th. According to Nolting's cable the following day:

In course of long discussion...Diem pointed the question. He asked for a bilateral defense treaty with the U.S. This rather large and unexpected request seemed to have been dragged in by the heels at the end of a far-ranging discussion, but we discovered upon questioning that it was seriously intended... 1/

Although the available record does not explicitly say so, this request presumably triggered the intensive attention to Vietnam planning that began early in October (Nolting's cable arrived October 1) and led to the decision on the 11th to send the Taylor Mission.

The balance of this chapter reviews the major developments between the Presidential decisions on the Task Force Report (May 11) and the arrival of Nolting's cable on the treaty request (October 1).

I. THE JOHNSON MISSION

The available record tells us almost nothing about the Vice President's visit to Saigon beyond what is described in the public memoirs. We know from Nolting's cables that Johnson brought up the possibility of U.S. troops in Vietnam and of a bilateral treaty after Diem (in an after-dinner conversation) began to talk about the problems that communist gains in Laos would create for him. We know that Diem replied that he wanted U.S. combat troops only in the event of open invasion and that he also did not show interest in a treaty. 2/

But we do not know what, if anything, Johnson was authorized to say if Diem had reacted affirmatively. And this could have ranged anywhere from attempting to discourage Diem if he did show interest, to offering some specific proposal and timetable. No strong inference can be drawn from the fact that Johnson, rather than Diem, raised the issue. Even if the President had decided against making troop commitments to Vietnam at that time, there would have been nothing outrageous about instructing Johnson to refer to such a possibility once Diem began to talk about his concerns due to Laos. After all, the whole point of the Johnson



mission was to reassure Diem and other Asian leaders, that the U.S. could, despite Laos, be counted on in Asia. Simply reading the American newspapers would have told Diem that at least as of May 5, the Administration was seriously considering sending American troops to Vietnam, and that Johnson was expected to discuss this with Diem. A quite reasonable tactical judgment would have been that nothing would have been more likely to make Diem ask for U.S. troops than for Johnson to remain eerily silent on this issue.

Consequently, on the record available, we can do no more than guess what would have happened if Diem reacted affirmatively at the time of Johnson's visit. The most reasonable guess is probably that the Taylor Mission, or something equivalent, would have been undertaken in the spring, rather than in the fall, and nothing very much would have been different in the long run. But that is only a reasonable guess.

For the rest, here are some extracts from a report Johnson wrote after his return. Essentially, Johnson argued for prompt moves by the U.S. to show support for non-communist governments in Southeast Asia. He had in mind expanded conventional military and economic aid, and perhaps a new treaty to replace SEATO. But despite the shock of U.S. willingness to accept a coalition government in Laos, Johnson reported that U.S. troops were neither desired nor required. And although this might not always be the case, Johnson recommended that the U.S. "must remain master of this decision." 3/

#### The Impact of Laos

There is no mistaking the deep - and long lasting - impact of recent developments in Laos.

Country to country, the degree differs but Laos has created doubt and concern about intentions of the United States throughout Southeast Asia. No amount of success at Geneva can, of itself, erase this. The independent Asians do not wish to have their own status resolved in like manner in Geneva.

Leaders such as Diem, Chiang, Sarit and Ayub more or less accept that we are making "the best of a bad bargain" at Geneva. Their charity extends no farther.

#### The Impact of the Mission

Beyond question, your judgement about the timing of our mission was correct. Each leader -- except Nehru -- publicly congratulated you on the "timing" of this mission. Chiang said -- and all others privately concurred -- that the mission had the effect of "stabilizing" the situation in the Southeast Asian nations.

What happened, I believe, was this: the leaders visited want -- as long as they can -- to remain as friends or allies of the United States. The public, or, more precisely, the political, reaction to Laos had drastically weakened the ability to maintain any strongly pro-US orientation. Neutrality in Thailand, collapse in Vietnam, anti-American election demagoguery in the Philippines were all developing prior to our visit. The show of strength and sincerity -- partly because you had sent the Vice President and partly, to a greater extent than you may believe, because you had sent your sister -- gave the friendly leaders something to "hang their hats on" for a while longer.

Our mission arrested the decline of confidence in the United States. It did not -- in my judgment -- restore any confidence already lost. The leaders were as explicit, as courteous and courtly as men could be in making it clear that deeds must follow words -- soon.

We didn't buy time -- we were given it.

If these men I saw at your request were bankers, I would know -- without bothering to ask -- that there would be no further extensions on my note.

\* \* \* \*

#### The Importance of Follow-Through

I cannot stress too strongly the extreme importance of following up this mission with other measures, other actions, and other efforts. At the moment -- because of Laos -- these nations are hypersensitive to the possibility of American hypocrisy toward Asia. Considering the Vienna talks with Khrushchev -- which, to the Asian mind, emphasize Western rather than Asian concerns -- and considering the negative line of various domestic American editorials about this mission, I strongly believe it is of first importance that this trip bear fruit immediately.

#### Personal Conclusions from the Mission

I took to Southeast Asia some basic convictions about the problems faced there. I have come away from the mission there -- and to India and Pakistan -- with many of those convictions sharpened and deepened by what I saw and learned. I have also reached certain other conclusions which I believe may be of value as guidance for those responsible in formulating policies.



These conclusions are as follows:

1. The battle against Communism must be joined in Southeast Asia with strength and determination to achieve success there -- or the United States, inevitably, must surrender the Pacific and take up our defenses on our own shores. Asian Communism is compromised and contained by the maintenance of free nations on the subcontinent. Without this inhibitory influence, the island outposts -- Philippines, Japan, Taiwan -- have no security and the vast Pacific becomes a Red Sea.
2. The struggle is far from lost in Southeast Asia and it is by no means inevitable that it must be lost. In each country it is possible to build a sound structure capable of withstanding and turning the Communist surge. The will to resist -- while now the target of subversive attack -- is there. The key to what is done by Asians in defense of Southeast Asian freedom is confidence in the United States.
3. There is no alternative to United States leadership in Southeast Asia. Leadership in individual countries -- or the regional leadership and cooperation so appealing to Asians -- rests on the knowledge and faith in United States power, will and understanding.
4. SEATO is not now and probably never will be the answer because of British and French unwillingness to support decisive action. Asian distrust of the British and French is outspoken. Success at Geneva would prolong SEATO's role. Failure at Geneva would terminate SEATO's meaningfulness. In the latter event, we must be ready with a new approach to collective security in the area.

We should consider an alliance of all the free nations of the Pacific and Asia who are willing to join forces in defense of their freedom. Such an organization should:

- a) have a clear-cut command authority
  - b) also devote attention to measures and programs of social justice, housing, land reform, etc.
5. Asian leaders -- at this time -- do not want American troops involved in Southeast Asia other than on training missions. American combat troop involvement is not only not required, it is not desirable. Possibly Americans -- fail to appreciate fully the subtlety that recently-colonial peoples would not look with favor upon governments which invited or accepted the return this soon of Western troops. To

the extent that fear of ground troop involvement dominates our political responses to Asia in Congress or elsewhere, it seems most desirable to me to allay those paralyzing fears in confidence, on the strength of the individual statements made by leaders consulted on this trip. This does not minimize or disregard the probability that open attack would bring calls for U.S. combat troops. But the present probability of open attack seems scant, and we might gain much needed flexibility in our policies if the spectre of combat troop commitment could be lessened domestically.

6. Any help -- economic as well as military -- we give less developed nations to secure and maintain their freedom must be a part of a mutual effort. These nations cannot be saved by United States help alone. To the extent the Southeast Asian nations are prepared to take the necessary measures to make our aid effective, we can be -- and must be -- unstinting in our assistance. It would be useful to enunciate more clearly than we have -- for the guidance of these young and unsophisticated nations -- what we expect or require of them.
7. In large measure, the greatest danger Southeast Asia offers to nations like the United States is not the momentary threat of Communism itself, rather that danger stems from hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease. We must -- whatever strategies we evolve -- keep these enemies the point of our attack, and make imaginative use of our scientific and technological capability in such enterprises.
8. Vietnam and Thailand are the immediate and most important trouble spots, critical to the U.S. These areas require the attention of our very best talents -- under the very closest Washington direction -- on matters economic, military and political.

The basic decision in Southeast Asia is here. We must decide whether to help these countries to the best of our ability or throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and [a] "Fortress America" concept. More important, we would say to the world in this case that we don't live up to treaties and don't stand by our friends. This is not my concept. I recommend that we move forward promptly with a major effort to help these countries defend themselves. I consider the key here is to get our best MAAG people to control, plan, direct and exact results from our military aid program. In Vietnam and Thailand, we must move forward together.

a. In Vietnam, Diem is a complex figure beset by many problems. He has admirable qualities, but he is remote from the



people, is surrounded by persons less admirable and capable than he. The country can be saved -- if we move quickly and wisely. We must decide whether to support Diem -- or let Vietnam fall. We must have coordination of purpose in our country team, diplomatic and military. The Saigon Embassy, USIS, MAAG and related operations leave much to be desired. They should be brought up to maximum efficiency. The most important thing is imaginative, creative, American management of our military aid program. The Vietnamese and our MAAG estimate that \$50 million of U.S. military and economic assistance will be needed if we decide to support Vietnam. This is the best information available to us at the present time and if it is confirmed by the best Washington military judgment it should be supported. Since you proposed and Diem agreed to a joint economic mission, it should be appointed and proceed forthwith.

b. In Thailand, the Thais and our own MAAG estimate probably as much is needed as in Vietnam -- about \$50 million of military and economic assistance. Again, should our best military judgment concur, I believe we should support such a program. Sarit is more strongly and staunchly pro-Western than many of his people. He is and must be deeply concerned at the consequence to his country of a communist-controlled Laos. If Sarit is to stand firm against neutralism, he must have -- soon -- concrete evidence to show his people of United States military and economic support. He believes that his armed forces should be increased to 150,000. His Defense Minister is coming to Washington to discuss aid matters.

\* \* \* \*

To recapitulate, these are the main impressions I have brought back from my trip.

The fundamental decision required of the United States -- and time is of the greatest importance -- is whether we are to attempt to meet the challenge of Communist expansion now in Southeast Asia by a major effort in support of the forces of freedom in the area or throw in the towel. This decision must be made in a full realization of the very heavy and continuing costs involved in terms of money, of effort and of United States prestige. It must be made with the knowledge that at some point we may be faced with the further decision of whether we commit major United States forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw should our other efforts fail. We must remain master in this decision. What we do in Southeast Asia should be part of a rational program to meet the threat we face in the region as a whole. It should include a clear-cut pattern of specific contributions to be expected by each partner according to his ability and resources. I recommend we proceed with a clear-cut and strong program of action.

## II. DIEM'S JUNE LETTER

During his visit Johnson, on behalf of Kennedy, invited Diem to prepare a set of proposals on South Vietnamese military needs for consideration by Washington. In a letter May 15, Diem told Kennedy that the definitive study would be ready in a few weeks. (He appreciated this invitation, Diem told Kennedy, "particularly because we have not become accustomed to being asked for our own views on our needs.)"

On June 9, Diem signed the promised letter. It was carried to Washington by a key Diem aide (Nguyen Dinh Thuan) and delivered on the 14th. (Thuan played a key role on the Vietnamese side throughout 1961. He was the man Darbrow, in the cable quoted in full earlier, suspected was the only cabinet member Diem had told about the CIP. In a memo to Gilpatric, Lansdale described him as Diem's "Secretary of Security, Defense, Interior, etc.") 4/

In the letter, Diem proposed an increase in the RVNAF to 270,000 men, or to double the 150,000 strength authorized at the start of 1961, and 100,000 men more than envisioned under the CIP. That was a large request: for up until the end of April, the U.S. and South Vietnamese were still haggling over the go-ahead for a 20,000-man increase. Further, Diem made it clear that he saw this force requirement as a semi-permanent increase in South Vietnamese strength, which would continue to be needed even should he eliminate the Viet Cong.

Here are some extracts from Diem's letter:

The situation...has become very much more perilous following the events in Laos, the more and more equivocal attitude of Cambodia and the intensification of the activities of aggression of international communism which wants to take the maximum advantage to accelerate the conquest of Southeast Asia. It is apparent that one of the major obstacles to the communist expansion on this area of the globe is Free Vietnam because with your firm support, we are resolved to oppose it with all our energies. Consequently, now and henceforth, we constitute the first target for the communists to overthrow at any cost. The enormous accumulation of Russian war material in North Vietnam is aimed, in the judgment of foreign observers, more at South Vietnam than at Laos. We clearly realize this dangerous situation but I want to reiterate to you here, in my personal name and in the name of the entire Vietnamese people, our indomitable will to win.

On the second of May, my council of generals met to evaluate the current situation and to determine the needs of the Republic of Vietnam to meet this situation. Their objective



evaluation shows that the military situation at present is to the advantage of the communists and that most of the Vietnamese Armed Forces are already committed to internal security and the protection of our 12 million inhabitants. For many months the communist-inspired fratricidal war has taken nearly one thousand casualties a month on both sides. Documents obtained in a recent operation, along route No. 9 which runs from Laos to Vietnam, contain definite proof that 2,860 armed agents have infiltrated among us in the course of the last four months.\* It is certain that this number rises each day. However, the Vietnamese people are showing the world that they are willing to fight and die for their freedom, not withstanding the temptations to neutralism and its false promises of peace being drummed into their ears daily by the communists.

In the light of this situation, the council of generals concluded that additional forces numbering slightly over 100,000 more than our new force level of 170,000 will be required to counter the ominous threat of communist domination...

After considering the recommendations of our generals and consulting with our American military advisors, we now conclude that to provide even minimum initial resistance to the threat, two new divisions of approximately 10,000 strength each are required to be activated at the earliest possible date. Our lightly held defensive positions along the demilitarized zone at our Northern border is even today being outflanked by communist forces which have defeated the Royal Laotian Army garrisons in Tchepone and other cities in Southern Laos. Our ARVN forces are so thoroughly committed to internal anti-guerrilla operations that we have no effective forces with which to counter this threat from Southern Laos. Thus, we need immediately one division for the First Army Corps and one for the Second Army Corps to provide at least some token resistance to the sizeable forces the communists are capable of bringing to bear against our Laotian frontier. Failing this, we would have no recourse but to withdraw our forces southward from the demilitarized zone and sacrifice progressively greater

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\* Diem's number implies an infiltration rate about 4 times as high as that estimated by U.S. intelligence in 1961, and twice as high as the hindsight revised 1961 estimates now in use.

areas of our country to the communists. These divisions should be mobilized and equipped, together with initial logistic support units, immediately after completion of activation of the presently contemplated increase of 20,000 which you have offered to support.

Following the activation of these units, which should begin in about five months, we must carry on the program of activation of additional units until over a period of two years we will have achieved a force of 14 infantry divisions, an expanded airborne brigade of approximately division strength and accompanying (support?)... The mission of this total 270,000 man force remains the same, namely, to overcome the insurgency which has risen to the scale of a bloody, communist-inspired civil war within our borders and to provide initial resistance to overt, external aggression until free world forces under the SEATO agreement can come to our aid. The question naturally arises as to how long we shall have to carry the burden of so sizeable a military force. Unfortunately, I can see no early prospects for the reduction of such a force once it has been established; for even though we may be successful in liquidating the insurgency within our borders, communist pressure in Southeast Asia and the external military threat to our country must be expected to increase, I fear, before it diminishes. This means that we must be prepared to maintain a strong defensive military posture for at least the foreseeable future in order that we may not become one of the so-called "soft spots" which traditionally have attracted communist aggression. We shall therefore continue to need material support to maintain this force whose requirements far exceed the capacity of our economy to support....

To accomplish this 100,000 man expansion of our military forces, which is perfectly feasible from a manpower viewpoint, will require a great intensification of our training programs in order to produce, in the minimum of time, those qualified combat leaders and technical specialists needed to fill the new units and to provide to them the technical and logistic support required to insure their complete effectiveness. For this purpose a considerable expansion of the United States Military Advisory Group is an essential requirement. Such an expansion, in the form of selected elements of the American Armed Forces to establish training centers for the Vietnamese Armed Forces, would serve the dual purpose of providing an expression of the United States' determination to halt the tide of communist aggression and of preparing our forces in the minimum of time.

While the Government and people of Vietnam are prepared to carry the heavy manpower burden required to save our country,



we well know that we cannot afford to pay, equip, train and maintain such forces as I have described. To make this effort possible, we would need to have assurances that this needed material support would be provided. 5/

The record is unclear on the immediate response to this letter. In particular, we have no record of the conversations Thuan had in Washington when he delivered the requests. The issue of the RVNAF increases somehow became part of the business of an economic mission then about to leave for Vietnam (the Staley Mission, discussed in the following section). The request for "selected elements of the American Armed Forces", raised in the next-to-last quoted paragraph, is left thoroughly obscure in the records we have--to the point where we are not at all sure either what Diem meant by it or how the Administration reacted to it. But, as will be seen in the section below on "U.S. Troops", nothing came of it.

### III. THE STALEY MISSION

One of the continuing negotiating items through most of 1961 was the extent to which the South Vietnamese should finance their own effort. The U.S. view was that the South Vietnamese were not doing enough. The result was American pressure on Diem to undertake what was called tax "reform." Diem was most reluctant to move. It is pretty clear that a large part of Diem's reluctance to move flowed from the same (well-founded) sense of personal insecurity that made him avoid establishing a clear military chain of command. On the latter issue, the risk of weakening the war effort obviously struck him as less dangerous than the risk of making a coup easier by concentrating military authority in his generals instead of dividing it between the generals and the 38 province chiefs. Similarly, for a ruler so unsure of his hold on the country, a serious effort at imposing austerity looked more risky than holding out for the Americans to provide a few more millions out of their vast resources. But Diem, of course, was hardly likely to admit such reasons to the Americans, assuming he admitted them to himself. Consequently, on these issues (as on many others) the record is a long story of tediously extracted promises, excuses for inaction, and American complaints about Diem's administrative style.

On the economic issue, the substance of the argument was this:

The deficit between what Diem raised in taxes and what his budget required was made up by the U.S. through a commercial import program. The regime sold the goods provided by the U.S. to South Vietnamese businessmen, and used the piasters thus acquired mainly to meet the local currency costs (mostly food and pay) for the armed forces. U.S. dissatisfaction with the South Vietnamese effort showed clearly in the decision to ask the South Vietnamese themselves to provide the local currency costs for the 20,000 man force increase proposed in the CIP, although the U.S. had been paying these costs (through the import program) for the balance

of the forces. The South Vietnamese insisted, for the outset, that they could not raise the piasters required.

The basic question of whether the South Vietnamese were bearing a reasonable share of the burden devolved into a number of technical issues, such as the effect of the program on inflation in South Vietnam, and the piaster/dollar exchange rate. The Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of the Task Force Report proposed that Diem be flatly assured that the U.S. would make up any deficit in the Vietnamese budget. But State objected from the start to giving any such assurance. Instead a joint commission of U.S. and South Vietnamese economic experts was proposed to work out a joint program dealing with these economic issues. This was one of the proposals Vice President Johnson carried with him on his mission. Diem accepted the proposal. And the U.S. team, headed by Eugene Staley (president of the Stanford Research Institute) was dispatched to South Vietnam in mid-June.

By the time the Staley Mission left, though, Diem had written the letter just quoted asking for U.S. support for a large further increase in his forces. Staley's group, with its Vietnamese counterpart, found themselves serving as the vehicle for the discussions on force levels. The report they issued is mostly about military issues, on which the economists stated they simply reflected instructions passed on by their respective governments. Here are some excerpts on the military issues (in addition, the report of course contained a discussion, rather vague as it turned out, of the economic issues which were nominally its purpose, and it also contained a good deal of very fine, vigorous language on the need for "crash programs" of economic and social development).

Viet Nam is today under attack in a bitter, total struggle which involves its survival as a free nation. Its enemy, the Viet Cong, is ruthless, resourceful, and elusive. This enemy is supplied, reinforced, and centrally directed by the international Communist apparatus operating through Hanoi. To defeat it requires the mobilization of the entire economic, military psychological, and social resources of the country and vigorous support from the United States.

The intensified program which we recommend our two countries adopt as a basis for mutual actions over the next several years is designed not just to hold the line but to achieve a real breakthrough. Our joint efforts must surpass the critical threshold of the enemy's resistance, thereby putting an end to his destructive attacks, and at the same time we must make a decisive impact on the economic, social, and ideological front.

The turn of events in Laos has created further serious problems with regard to the maintenance of the GVN as a free



and sovereign non-Communist nation. In particular, the uncovering of the Laotian-Viet Nam border to DRV or DRV-supported forces creates a serious threat of increased covert infiltration of personnel, supplies, and equipment to the Viet Cong. With such increased support, the Viet Cong undoubtedly hope to seize firm military control of a geographic area and announce the establishment therein of a "rebel" government for South Viet Nam which would then be recognized by and receive military support from the DRV, Communist China, and Soviet Russia. (Example: The present situation in Laos.)

The joint VN-US group does not consider itself competent to make specific recommendations as to desired force levels for the defense of Viet Nam. They have, however, after consultation with their respective military authorities, adopted for economic planning purposes certain estimated strength figures for the GVN armed forces under two alternative assumptions. Alternative A assumes that the Communist-led insurgency effort remains at approximately its present level of intensity and the Government of Laos maintains sufficient independence from the Communist Bloc to deny authority for the transit of DRV or Communist Chinese troops across its borders. Alternative B assumes that the Viet Cong are able to significantly increase their insurgency campaign within Viet Nam and that the situation in Laos continues to deteriorate to the point where the Communists gain de facto control of that country.

Alternative A called for a build-up of Diem's forces to 200,000 (vs. 170,000 then authorized). Alternative B called for continuing the build-up to 270,000. On this basis, Kennedy agreed to provide support for the increase to 200,000. The 200,000-man approval was supposed to be contingent on South Vietnamese agreement to a plan for using the forces. The question of a further increase to 270,000 was deferred, since it did not need to be faced until the lower figure was being approached, sometime late in 1962. 6/

A consequence of the Staley Mission was the South Vietnamese troop levels needed little attention in the fall review: the U.S. simply decided to support the increase to 200,000 even though the agreed plan for using the forces did not yet exist (as in May the U.S. had agreed to support the increase to 170,000 which also, it will be recalled, was supposed to have been contingent on such a plan).

A few points about the Staley Mission seem useful to keep in mind in reviewing the fall process:

1. It is another reminder of the prevailing (although not universal) over-optimism of U.S. appraisals of the Vietnam problem.

2. One of the follow-on actions to the report was supposed to be a Vietnamese announcement of a program of social reform. Producing this piece of paper (and in the end it was not much more than a piece of paper) took months. It was experiences such as this that gave questions about the viability of the Diem regime greater prominence in the fall review than they had received during April and May.

3. The U.S. was still continuing to deal with Diem most gently. Nothing more was asked of Diem as a quid pro quo than that he finally work up a plan for the counterinsurgency. The President explicitly accepted the assumptions of the Joint Plan worked out by the Staley Mission and their Vietnamese counterparts.

This is from the formal record of decision:

Joint Program of Action  
With the Government of  
Vietnam (Staley Report)

August 4, 1961

The President agrees with the three basic tenets on which the recommendations contained in the Joint Action Program are based, namely:

- a. Security requirements must, for the present, be given first priority.
- b. Military operations will not achieve lasting results unless economic and social programs are continued and accelerated.
- c. It is in our joint interest to accelerate measures to achieve a self-sustaining economy and a free and peaceful society in Viet-Nam. 7/

Similar language was used at the time of the May decisions. So it is not new. It is only that, in the light of Diem's inactivity, the phrases implying that non-military efforts are also important had come to sound a little hollow.

#### IV. U.S. COMBAT TROOPS

From the time of the Laos Annex to the original Gilpatric/Lansdale draft of the Task Force Report (April 28), the record shows persistent activity on some level or other on the issue of sending U.S. combat troops to Vietnam.



At the time of the Task Force review, it will be recalled, Defense recommended sending two 1600-man combat units to Vietnam to set up two training centers for the Vietnamese in the highlands. In later drafts of the Task Force report, this proposal was broadened to consider sending American troops for wider purposes, short of direct combat against the Viet Cong. But the proposal was downgraded to a subject for study and was no longer a definite recommendation.

Here is a summary of the items (on the issue of U.S. combat troops) in the record available to this study following Kennedy's decisions on the Task Force Report (May 11).

On May 12 Vice President Johnson discussed the question with Diem, as described in an earlier section. This seems to have resolved the issue (negatively) so far as Johnson was concerned, and possibly as far as President Kennedy was concerned. But if it did, the President's view was not very emphatically passed on to subordinate members of the Administration. For a week later, Lansdale sent a memo to Gilpatric noting that Diem did not want U.S. combat units as such, but that he might accept these units if they had a mission of training South Vietnamese forces:

Ambassador Nolting /said/ that President Diem would welcome as many U.S. military personnel as needed for training and advising Vietnamese forces. /MAAG Chief/ General McGarr, who was also present at this discussion /between Johnson and Diem/, reported that while President Diem would not want U.S. combat forces for the purpose of fighting Communists in South Vietnam, he would accept deployment of U.S. combat forces as trainers for the Vietnamese forces at any time. 8/

This language leaves it unclear whether McGarr was merely stating his opinion (which supported his own desire to bring in U.S. combat units), or reporting what he understood Diem to have said.

(About the same day of Lansdale's memo--May 18--the JCS had restated its recommendation of May 10 that combat troops should be sent to Vietnam; and McGarr, from Saigon, had recommended sending a 16,000 man force, or if Diem would not accept that, a 10,000 man force with the nominal mission of establishing training centers for the Vietnamese. The similar recommendation made in the Task Force drafts had suggested 3200 men for the force.) 9/

In any event, Lansdale's memo makes it quite clear that he (along with McGarr and the JCS) were primarily interested in getting U.S. combat units into Vietnam, with the training mission a possible device for getting Diem to accept them. After a discussion of JCS and CINCPAC planning and of alternative locations for the troops, Lansdale comments:

...any of the above locations have good areas for training of Vietnamese forces, if this were to be a mission of the U.S. forces.

In the available papers, no one at this time talked about using American units to directly fight the Viet Cong. Rather it was mainly in terms of relieving Vietnamese units to undertake offensive action. We can only guess what people were really thinking. As the training-the-Vietnamese rationale seems essentially a device for getting Diem to accept the units, the non-combatant role for U.S. troops may have been (and probably was in the minds of at least some of the planners) mainly a device for calming those members of the Administration who were reluctant to involve American units in fighting the Viet Cong. Certainly in hindsight, it seems most unrealistic to suppose that American combat units could have been stationed in a center of Viet Cong activity (a number of papers postulate the insurgents were attempting to establish a "liberated area" in the high plateau, which was the principal locale discussed) without themselves becoming involved in the fighting.

Lansdale concluded his memo by reminding Gilpatric that Diem was sending Thuan ("Secretary of Security, Defense, Interior, etc.") to Washington to deliver his letter on Vietnam's "definitive military needs." Lansdale recommended that Gilpatric take up the question of whether Diem would accept U.S. troops with Thuan. "With concrete information, you will then have a firm position for further decisions."

But apparently someone did not want to wait for Thuan. For on May 27, Nolting reported that he had brought up the question of what Diem meant in his conversation with Johnson directly with Diem, and that Diem did not then want U.S. combat units "for this or any other reason." 10/

Nevertheless, on June 9, Diem signed the letter to Kennedy that, as quoted above, asked for:

...selected elements of the American Armed Forces to establish training centers for the Vietnamese Armed Forces, ...

a move which Diem stated:

...would serve the dual purpose of providing an expression of the United States' determination to halt the tide of communist aggression and of preparing our forces in the minimum of time. 11/

This certainly sounded very much like the recommendation of the Task Force draft, or McGarr's later expanded version of that proposal; particularly, since Diem explicitly stated that he had McGarr's advice in



drafting the proposals. But where the American proposals were for training whole South Vietnamese divisions, Diem said the training centers would be for combat leaders and technical specialists. Consequently, it seems that Diem did not have the same thing in mind in referring to "selected elements of the American Armed Forces" as did McGarr and others interested in bringing in American combat units. It may be that Diem agreed to put in this request that sounded like what McGarr wanted as a concession to the Americans in return for support of the large increase in the RVNAF he was asking.

Presumably this was clarified during the discussions Thuan had after delivering the letter. But, as noted earlier, we have no record of the conversations. In any event, nothing came of the proposal.

(A summary of Diem's letter, cabled to the American mission in Saigon the day after the letter was received in Washington, did not use the phrase "selected elements of the American Armed Forces." Instead it said that Diem asked for an increase of "American personnel" to establish the training centers. The crucial issue, of course, was whether Americans would be sent to Vietnam in the form of organized combat units, capable of, if not explicitly intended, for conducting combat operations. We do not know whether the wording of the summary reflected Thuan's clarification of the proposal when he arrived in Washington, or a high level Administration decision to interpret Diem's letter as not asking for combat units, or merely sloppy drafting of the cable.)

It seems clear that either Diem (despite the language of the letter he signed) really did not want American units, or that Kennedy (despite the activity of his subordinates) did not want to send those units, or both.

Sorenson, in his memoir, says that in May Kennedy decided against sending combat units despite the recommendations he received at the time of the Task Force Report. But his account of the Task Force is in error on a number of details, and so it is hard to know how much to credit his recollection. 12/

But there is a final item apparently from this period that seems to support Sorenson. It is a handwritten undated note on a piece of scratch paper from Rostow to McNamara. It looks like a note passed at a meeting. From its location in the file, it was probably written about June 5, that is, a few days before Thuan arrived with Diem's letter. It reads:

Bob:

We must think of the kind of forces and missions for Thailand now, Vietnam later.

We need a guerrilla deterrence operation in Thailand's northeast.

We shall need forces to support a counter-guerrilla war in Vietnam:

aircraft  
helicopters  
communications men  
special forces  
militia teachers  
etc.

WWR 13/

Two things are striking about this note: first, it is a quite exact description of the sort of military assistance Kennedy finally dispatched to Vietnam (i.e., combat support and advisors but not American units capable of independent combat against the guerrillas). Second, it certainly suggests that despite what Lansdale, McGarr, and others were doing, those close to the President were not at this time thinking about sending American combat units to Vietnam (or any American forces, for even the units Rostow lists are for "later" in contrast to "Thailand now"). Nevertheless on July 20, McGarr again raised the question of combat units for training with Diem, and reported again that he did not want them.

In general, we seem to be seeing here a pattern that first began to emerge in the handling of the Task Force Report and which will be even more strikingly evident in the President's handling of the Taylor Report.

Someone or other is frequently promoting the idea of sending U.S. combat units. Kennedy never makes a clear-cut decision but some way or other action is always deferred on any move that would probably lead to engagements on the ground between American units and the Viet Cong.

We have no unambiguous basis for judging just what had really happened in each case. But we do see a similar pattern at least twice and possibly three different times: in May, perhaps again in June (depending on details of Thuan's talks in Washington not available to this study), and as we will report shortly, again in November. In each case, the record seems to be moving toward a decision to send troops, or at least to a Presidential decision that, in principal, troops should be sent if Diem can be persuaded to accept them. But no such decision is ever reached. The record never shows the President himself as the controlling figure. In June, there does not seem to be any record of what happened, at least in the files available to this study. In May and, as we will see, in November, the President conveniently receives a revised draft of the recommendations which no longer requires him to commit himself.

No reliable inference can be drawn from this about how Kennedy would have behaved in 1965 and beyond had he lived. (One of those who had advised retaining freedom of action on the issue of sending U.S. combat



troops was Lyndon Johnson.) It does not prove that Kennedy behaved soundly in 1961. Many people will think so; but others will argue that the most difficult problem of recent years might have been avoided if the U.S. had made a hard commitment on the ground in South Vietnam in 1961.

## V. THE TREATY REQUEST

As to Diem, we have, of course, even less in the way of a record from which to judge what he really thought he was doing. But it is not hard to understand why he should be reluctant to accept U.S. combat troops. His stated reason was always that sending U.S. combat units would signal the end of the Geneva Accords. But this explanation explains little. Diem thought the Geneva Accords were betrayal of Vietnam in 1954, and a farce, freely violated by the communists, later. Consequently, he would be concerned about their demise only if North Vietnam could use this as a pretext for an overt invasion. But North Vietnam had long had a suitable pretext for an invasion in Diem's refusal to discuss the elections called for under the Geneva Accords. Diem's shield was the threat of U.S. intervention, not the Geneva Accords, and it is mighty hard to see how this shield could be weakened by putting American troops on the ground in South Vietnam.

But there were other reasons for Diem to be wary of U.S. troops. For one thing, not even Diem's severest critics questioned his commitment to Vietnamese nationalism. The idea of inviting foreign troops back into Vietnam must surely have been distasteful even once he decided it was unavoidable. Further, the presence of American troops in Vietnam had a very ambivalent effect on the risk to Diem of a military coup. To the extent American troops increased the sense of security, they would lessen the likelihood of a coup, which the military rationalized mainly on the grounds that they could not win the war under Diem. But the larger the American military presence in the country, the more Diem would have to worry about American ability and temptation to encourage a coup if Diem incurred American displeasure.

The net impact of these conflicting effects would depend on the security situation in Vietnam. If Diem felt strong, he would probably not want American troops; if he felt weak, he might see no choice but to risk inviting the Americans in. Even at the time of the Taylor mission, we will see Diem is most erratic on this issue.

Against this background, it is easy to understand why Diem, when the situation got worse in September, should have "pointed the question" at whether the U.S. would give him a treaty, rather than whether the U.S. would send in troops. As far as we can see, he was mostly concerned about what the latest VC attacks were doing to confidence in his regime, rather than any fear that the VC, still estimated at fewer than 20,000 strong, were going to defeat the quarter million regulars and auxiliaries in his own forces. What he probably wanted was an unambiguous public commitment

that the Americans would not let Vietnam fall. For this would meet his immediate concern about confidence in his regime, perhaps even more effectively than the dispatch of American troops, and without the disadvantages that would come with accepting American troops. For Diem, a clear-cut treaty probably seemed the best possible combination of maximizing the American commitment while minimizing American leverage. And that, of course, would help explain why the Administration was not terribly attracted to such a proposal.



## VI. THE SITUATION IN SEPTEMBER

So far as the available record shows, there was no sense of imminent crisis in the official reporting to Washington as fall of 1961 began. An NIE published in mid-August concluded that Diem faced a "prolonged and difficult struggle" against the insurgency, and noted that "the French with their memories of the Indochina that was and the British with their experience in Malaya tend to be pessimistic regarding GVN prospects for combating the insurgency." 14/ But the NIE also reported that Diem's army had been performing better in 1961 than in 1960. Warning of possible trouble 100 months, rather than weeks, ahead. The danger foreseen was a coup: "if the fight against the Viet Cong goes poorly during the next year or the South Vietnamese Army suffers heavy casualties, the chances of a military coup would substantially increase." 15/

The judgment of the NIE on the effects of such a coup was entirely negative:

If there is a serious disruption of GVN leadership as a result of Diem's death or as the result of a military coup, any momentum of GVN's counterinsurgency efforts had achieved will be halted or reversed, at least for a time. The confusion and suspicion attending a coup effort could provide the communists with an opportunity to seize control of the government. 16/

There is no mention of any offsetting hope for a coup leading to more effective prosecution of the war. The overall impression left by the NIE is that Diem is not a very effective leader, but that he is getting along well enough to make the risks of a coup look more dangerous than the risks of the war being unwinnable under his leadership. In particular, a coup (or Diem's death) were seen as the only thing that could bring a quick collapse of the Saigon regime, as opposed to the loss over time of a "prolonged and difficult" struggle.

MAAG Chief McGarr, in a report dated September 1, spoke of the "enhanced sense of urgency and offensive spirit now present within both the RVNAF and the Government of Vietnam..." Under the heading "Outlook for Next Year," he reported:

With the increased effectiveness of the Armed Forces beginning to be demonstrated by the recent operations in the Delta Region and the manifest intent of the U.S. to continue and even step up its vital support of the Vietnamese in their struggle against Communism, there is a spirit of renewed confidence beginning to permeate the people, the GVN, and the Armed Forces. 17/

The political reporting from Saigon was less optimistic. Generally, these reports argued that Diem was not doing much to strengthen his support.

But there was no disagreement with McGarr's fairly optimistic assessment of the military situation and no sense of crisis.

Through unofficial channels, though, the White House was receiving a far bleaker view of the situation. Schelsinger reports:

'The situation gets worse almost week by week,' Theodore H. White wrote us in August. '...The guerrillas now control almost all the southern delta - so much so that I could find no American who would drive me outside Saigon in his car even by day without military convoy.' He reported a 'political breakdown of formidable proportions: ...what perplexes hell out of me is that the Commies, on their side, seem to be able to find people willing to die for their cause...I find it discouraging to spend a night in a Saigon night-club full of young fellows of 20 and 25 dancing and jitterbugging (they are called 'la jeunesse cowboy') while twenty miles away their Communist contemporaries are terrorizing the countryside.' An old China hand, White was reminded of Chungking in the Second World War, complete with Madame Nhu in the role of Madame Chiang Kai-shek. 'If a defeat in South Vietnam is to be considered our defeat, if we are responsible for holding that area, then we must have authority to act. And that means intervention in Vietnam politics...If we do decide so to intervene, have we the proper personnel, the proper instruments, the proper clarity of objectives to intervene successfully?' 18/

It did not take long to confirm White's pessimism, although this must have made the dilemma of what to do about it seem all the more acute. In September, the number of VC attacks jumped to nearly triple the level (about 450 vs. 150) that had prevailed for some months previously. The most spectacular attack, which seems to have had a shattering effect in Saigon, was the seizure of Phuoc Thanh, a provincial capital only 55 miles from Saigon. The insurgents held the town a good part of the day, publicly beheaded Diem's province chief, and departed before government troops arrived. The official reporting to Washington by the end of the month pictured the situation as stagnating, if not dangerously deteriorating, although there continued to be no sense of the imminent crisis that Theodore White foresaw.

Here is an end-of-month report that Nolting sent just prior to the meeting at which Diem asked for the treaty:

Status report on political items as of Sept 28:

General: Governmental and civil situation at end of month much same as at beginning. While neither of these gave open signs of deterioration, Diem government did not significantly improve its political position among people or substantially further national unity. On positive side several fifty-man district level reconstruction teams were sent to each of 4 provinces, and there was



commendable amount country-side travel by ministers. On other hand, report was received of high-level bickering over powers and authority of new central intelligence organization (FVS-6487), and Diem expressed dissatisfaction with pace of field command's planning of counter-insurgency operations, but he has still not delegated sufficient authority to field command. All in all we unable report that Sept saw progress toward attainment task force goals of creating viable and increasingly democratic society. Some such 'shot in arm' as proposed joint communique seems desirable.

Series large scale VC attacks in various areas central Vietnam during month highlighted increased VC infiltrations through Laos and underscored urgency of free world policy toward Laos which would bring this situation under control. These VC actions plus temporary VC seizure of provincial capital of Phuoc Thanh demonstrated that tide not yet turned in guerrilla war... 19/

The "shot in the arm" Nolting referred to was the communique on social reforms that was agreed to some weeks earlier at the time of the Staley Mission; it would finally be issued, in a watered down form, early in January. The contrast between White's and Nolting's reporting is sharp: White obviously would not have seen the issuing of a communique as a significant "shot in the arm," or commented on the VC show of strength in such mild terms as demonstrating "that tide not yet turned." Consequently, although Diem's request for a treaty (a day after this cable was sent) surprised Nolting, its effect at the White House was presumably to confirm the warning that had already been received through White.

The State Department's view of the situation seems also to have been graver than that of the Embassy in Saigon. We have a situation summary on Southeast Asia that refers to Nolting's cable but not to Diem's treaty request, and which consequently must have been distributed about October 1. On the political situation in South Vietnam, the summary quotes Nolting's "no progress" comments. But the military situation is described more bleakly than Nolting did.

#### SOUTH VIET-NAM - MILITARY

1. Although GVN military capabilities have increased, Viet Cong capabilities are increasing at more rapid rate and Viet Cong attacks have increased in size.

2. Viet Cong 'regular' forces have increased from about 7,000 at beginning of year to approximately 17,000.

3. Viet Cong have moved from stage of small hands to large units. During September Viet Cong mounted three attacks with over 1,000 men in each. Viet Cong strategy may be directed at 'liberating' an area in which a 'government' could be installed.

4. Although vast majority of Viet Cong troops are of local origin, the infiltration of Viet Cong cadres from North Viet-Nam via

Laos, the demilitarized zone, and by sea appears to be increasing. However, there is little evidence of major supplies from outside sources, most arms apparently being captured or stolen from GVN forces or from the French during the Indo-China war. 20/

On Laos, the situation summary showed no such pessimism. But, overall the absence of bad news from Laos only added to the worry about South Vietnam. For the paper reported:

There probably have been some Viet Minh withdrawals from northern Laos but Viet Minh movement into Southern Laos bordering on South Vietnam has increased. Thus it appears enemy may be accepting stalemate for time being within Laos and giving priority to stepping up offensive action against South Vietnam. 21/

Two final items are worth bearing in mind in trying to see the Vietnamese problem as it might have appeared to the White House in the fall of 1961. First, this warning of the effect of U.S. policy in Vietnam, from the August 15 NIE quoted earlier:

International Attitudes. In providing the GVN a maximum of encouragement and extensive support in its struggle against the Communists, the US will inevitably become identified with the GVN's success or failure. The US will be under heavy pressure from other members of the non-Communist world, many of whom view the Vietnam struggle in differing terms. For example, the neighboring countries, such as Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Nationalist China, have all to some extent viewed developments in Laos as a gauge of US willingness and ability to help an anti-Communist Asian government stand against a Communist 'national liberation' campaign. They will almost certainly look upon the struggle for Vietnam as a critical test of such US willingness and ability. All of them, including the neutrals, would probably suffer demoralization and loss of confidence in their prospects for maintaining their independence if the Communists were to gain control of South Vietnam. This loss of confidence might even extend to India. 22/

Second, a couple of newspaper quotes may serve as a reminder of the extent to which the Kennedy Administration had been under a constant sense of foreign policy crisis throughout its first year, with every evidence of more to come. In late September, in a review piece on Congressional appraisals of Kennedy's first year, Russell Baker comments that not even Congress seems much interested in debate about Kennedy's effectiveness in pushing through legislation:

What makes it particularly irrelevant this autumn is that Congress itself has been far more concerned ever since January



with the President's performance as guardian of the national security than with how he came out as chief warrior for a legislative program.

From Laos to Cuba to Vienna to Berlin to the Soviet nuclear testing site at Semipalatinsk to New York's East River, crisis after crisis has fallen across the White House with a rapidity and gravity that has absorbed Mr. Kennedy's energy since his inauguration and reduced the Congressional program to secondary importance. 23/

And a couple of days later, James Reston, describing the imminent risk of a nuclear crisis over Berlin, reported:

Specifically, Khrushchev told one of Mr. Kennedy's political emissaries that once Khrushchev signs a separate peace treaty with the Communist East Germans, not only all of the West's rights in Berlin will cease, but all traffic to Berlin will cease until the West negotiates new rights of access with the East German regime.

Khrushchev was questioned minutely on this key point. His reply was unequivocal: Not one truck, or barge, or train, or plane would leave from West Germany for West Berlin after the separate peace treaty until the new arrangements with the East Germans were negotiated.

Now, this is not precisely the same as Mr. Gromyko's bland assurances. This is blockade, and blockade is an act of war. Washington has made clear that it is not going to get stirred up if the East Germans merely replace the Russians on the borders between East and West Germany and approve the flow of adequate supplies. But Mr. Khrushchev did not support this procedure, and went on to threaten that any effort to break his blockade by force would lead to war. 24/

Since Khrushchev had repeatedly pledged to sign the East German treaty by the end of the year, the showdown was not far off.

IV.B.

CHAPTER V

I. THE DECISION TO SEND TAYLOR

As of early October, there were several proposals for more active intervention in Southeast Asia on the table. One was the JCS-favored plan to intervene on the ground in Laos to seize and hold major portions of the country, principally to protect the borders of South Vietnam and Thailand. A second plan (referred to in a staff paper as the "Rostow proposal") would have put a SEATO force of about 25,000 men into Vietnam to try to mount a guard on the Vietnam/Laos border between the DMZ and Cambodia. Finally, there were various schemes, dating from the Task Force review, for putting a U.S. force into the highlands, or at DaNang with or without a nominal mission of training South Vietnamese troops.

Except for the Rostow proposal all these plans pre-dated the spurt of Viet Cong activity in September and Diem's subsequent request for a treaty. The record does not tell when and why the Rostow proposal was drawn up. It was probably a direct response to Diem's request, but it may have been simply a part of the on-going Laos contingency planning. In any event, Rostow's proposal was submitted to the JCS for comment October 5. On the 9th, the JCS responded with a counter-proposal for a substantial (initially about 20,000 men, but expected to grow) commitment of U.S. forces in Vietnam, centered on Pleiku in the highlands. 1/

In hindsight, the JCS reasoning in rejecting the Rostow proposal looks unchallengeable. The JCS stated:

- a. SEATO forces will be deployed over a border of several hundred miles, and will be attacked piecemeal or by-passed at the Viet Cong's own choice.
- b. It may reduce but cannot stop infiltration of Viet Cong personnel and material.
- c. It deploys SEATO forces in the weakest defense points should DRV or CHICOM forces intervene.
- d. It compounds the problems of communications and logistical support.

The Chiefs also argued against an alternative border proposal to put the SEATO force along the 17th parallel. Their first preference, very emphatically, was to go into Laos:



As stated in your [Gilpatric's] memorandum, the proposed concept set forth must be analyzed in the total context of the defense of Southeast Asia. Any concept which deals with the defense of Southeast Asia that does not include all or a substantial portion of Laos is, from a military standpoint, unsound. To concede the majority of northern and central Laos would leave three-quarters of the border of Thailand exposed and thus invite an expansion of communist military action. To concede southern Laos would open the flanks of both Thailand and South Vietnam as well as expose Cambodia. Any attempt to combat insurgency in South Vietnam, while holding areas in Laos essential to the defense of Thailand and South Vietnam and, at the same time, putting troops in Thailand, would require an effort on the part of the United States alone on the order of magnitude of at least three divisions plus supporting units. This would require an additional two divisions from the United States.

What is needed is not the spreading out of our forces throughout Southeast Asia, but rather a concentrated effort in Laos where a firm stand can be taken saving all or substantially all of Laos which would, at the same time, protect Thailand and protect the borders of South Vietnam.

But, if the Laos plan was "politically unacceptable at this time," the Chiefs "provided" (but did not explicitly recommend) "a possible limited interim course of action" which could...

provide a degree of assistance to the Government of South Vietnam to regain control of its own territory, and could free certain South Vietnamese forces for offensive actions against the Viet Cong. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that implementation of this limited course of action would not provide for the defense of Thailand or Laos, nor contribute substantially or permanently to solution of the overall problem of defense of Southeast Asia, they consider the Plan preferable to either of the two military possibilities described in referenced memorandum. 2/

The following day, there appeared a new paper called "Concept of Intervention in Vietnam." The paper, according to a pencilled note on the available copy, was drafted mainly by Alexis Johnson, who was then a Deputy Under Secretary of State. We know from a note William Bundy (then principal Deputy to Paul Nitze, who was then Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA) sent to McNamara that a "talking paper" by Johnson was to be discussed at a meeting that included, at least, Rusk and McNamara on the afternoon of the 10th. But we do not know whether the draft we have available is the "talking paper" or a revision put together later in the day, after the meeting.

The proposal ("an effort to arrest and hopefully reverse the deteriorating situation in Vietnam") was a blend of Rostow's border force and the Chief's "possible limited interim course of action." Johnson's paper listed both the Rostow mission of the force (attempt to close the border) and that of the Chiefs (win control of the central highlands); otherwise the paper followed the JCS plan. What probably happened, considering the haste with which the paper must have been drafted, was that Johnson simply blended the two proposals together and assumed the fine points could be worked out later. For if the paper is somewhat confusing on the immediate military proposal, it is clear on the long-run thinking that underlays the proposal. And this long-run thinking made the immediate military mission relatively inconsequential, since as with the earlier combat-troops-for-training proposals, it was pretty clear that the main idea was to get some American combat troops into Vietnam, with the nominal excuse for doing so quite secondary.

The plan was described under the heading "Initial Phase." A subsequent section, titled "Anticipated Later Phases" states:

This initial action cannot be taken without accepting as our real and ultimate objective the defeat of the Viet Cong, and making Vietnam secure in the hands of an anti-Communist government. Thus supplemental military action must be envisaged at the earliest stage that is politically feasible. The ultimate force requirements cannot be estimated with any precision. JCS are now considering. Three divisions would be a guess...

Earlier the paper, in a similar vein, had remarked:

While a satisfactory political settlement in Laos would considerably reduce Viet Minh infiltration through Laos into South Vietnam, it would not entirely eliminate it. While such a reduction would materially assist the GVN in meeting the Viet Cong threat, there is no assurance that, even under these circumstances, the GVN will in the foreseeable future be able to defeat the Viet Cong. Under these circumstances, although the need of South Vietnam for outside assistance such as proposed in this plan would probably still be very strong, it would be much more difficult to find a political base upon which to execute this plan. 3/

This judgment was probably influenced by a special NIE issued October 5th, which stated that 80-90% of the estimated 17,000 VC had been locally recruited, and that there was little evidence that the VC relied on external supplies.

The relation of this paper to Diem's request for treaty can only be guessed at. The paper never mentions Diem, or any South Vietnamese request for further assistance. But the paper supplemented one published about a



week or so earlier (probably prior to Diem's request) titled "Limited Holding Actions in Southeast Asia." This earlier paper discussed various steps short of major troop deployments. 4/

The impression is that both papers were part of contingency planning (short of major intervention in Laos) for saving something in Southeast Asia should the Laos negotiations continue to drag on with no satisfactory resolution. Thus although the timing of the Vietnam paper was surely influenced and probably triggered by Diem's request for a treaty, it looks essentially like a suggestion (but not a formal recommendation) to the President that if he is unwilling to intervene to try to save Laos, he should at least take strong and unambiguous action to make sure that Vietnam would not also be lost. In this interpretation it is easy to make sense of the emphasis on a deteriorating situation in Vietnam, and the implied warning that it might be best to set this plan in motion before a settlement is reached in Laos, when it seemed relatively easy to provide a politically plausible basis for the action.

(In a recent column, Joseph Alsop quoted Averill Harriman as telling him that Kennedy had told Harriman to get whatever settlement he could on Laos, but that the U.S. really intended to make its stand in Vietnam.) 5/

At the end of the Vietnam paper there is a list of "Specific Actions to be Taken Now" which goes no further (on Vietnam) than to list:

Use of U.S. naval aircraft and ships to assist GVN in interdiction of sea traffic, to assist self defense of GVN. This is to some extent camouflagable.

If necessity arises, use of U.S. military aircraft for logistic support, including troop lift within Laos and South Vietnam.

Further, there is a long list of pros and cons, with no judgment stated on the balance.

This (and other statements to be cited below) suggests, again, that the paper was prepared for a discussion on Southeast Asia planning in the NSC, rather than in response to a request for a set of recommendations.

Three other points need to be mentioned:

1. The paper, although nominally presenting a SEATO plan, explicitly assumes that "planning would have to be on the basis of proceeding with whichever SEATO Allies would participate."

2. The paper warns (in the balance of the paragraph quoted earlier) that the ultimate force requirements would "much depend" on the capabilities and leadership of the SEATO forces...

and above all on whether the effort leads to much more better fighting by Diem's forces. They alone can win in the end.

3. Very clearly foreshadowing the Taylor mission (and perhaps indicating a White House hand in the drafting) the paper states:

The viability of this plan would be dependent on the degree to which it could and would also result in the GVN accelerating political and military action in its own defense. A judgment on this can only be reached after thorough exploration on the spot with the country team and the GVN.

Finally, here is the list of pros and cons presented (but not evaluated) in the paper.

#### "Cons

"1. The plan would not in itself solve the underlying problem of ridding SVN of communist guerrillas.

"2. It would not seal off the borders of SVN except for the limited area of operations.

"3. It breaks the Geneva Accords and puts responsibility on the U.S. for rationalizing the action before the U.N. and the world.

"4. It raises questions of U.S. troop relationships with the Vietnamese peasants, montagnards, GVN and its army.

"5. The use of SEATO forces in SVN distorts Plan Five although these forces are not a net subtraction.

"6. The risk of being regarded as interlopers à la the French must be considered.

"7. Communist change of tactics back to small-scale operations might leave this force in a stagnant position.

#### "Pros

"1. The effect on GVN morale of SEATO engagement in their struggle could be most heartening.

"2. It could prevent the Viet Cong move to the next stage of battalion-size, formal organization to challenge the ARVN.

"3. The relatively sophisticated SEATO arms, air power, communications and intelligence might spark a real transformation in ARVN tactics and action.



"4. Capitalizing on U.S. intelligence sources now unavailable to the GVN could lead to effective attacks on Viet Cong nerve centers of command and communications.

"5. The SEATO force commitment could be used to get from Diem a package of actions McGarr feels are needed to step up the GVN effort [mainly the familiar items of clarifying the chain of command and establishing an overall plan].

"6. Introducing SEATO forces would give us for the first time some bargaining position with the Russians for a settlement in Vietnam.

"7. If we go into South Vietnam now with SEATO, the costs would be much less than if we wait and go in later, or lose SVN.

The available record shows three other papers prepared prior to the NSC meeting, October 11, at which this paper was considered:

1. A special NIE commented on the plan in terms that were a lot less than encouraging:

In the situation assumed, we believe that the DRV would seek at first to test the seriousness and effectiveness of the SEATO effort by subjecting the SEATO forces and their lines of communication to harassment, ambush, and guerrilla attack. The Communists would probably estimate that by using their Viet Cong apparatus in South Vietnam, and by committing experienced guerrilla forces from North Vietnam in guerrilla operations in territory long familiar to them, and by exploiting the opportunities offered by the sizable junk traffic in coastal waters, they could severely harass the SEATO land forces and penetrate the SEATO blockade. The Communists would expect worthwhile political and psychological rewards from successful harassment and guerrilla operations against SEATO forces, including lowered GVN morale and increased tensions among the SEATO members.

While seeking to test the SEATO forces, the DRV would probably not relax its Viet Cong campaign against the GVN to any significant extent. Meanwhile, Communist strength in south Laos would probably be increased by forces from North Vietnam to guard against an effort to partition Laos or an attack against the Pathet Lao forces. The Soviet airlift would probably be increased with a heavier flow of military supply into south Laos, and the Communists would probably intensify their efforts to establish a secure route for motor traffic into the south. The establishment of a coalition government in Laos under Souvanna Phouma probably would not significantly reduce Communist infiltration of men and equipment from North to South Vietnam through Laos.

If the SEATO action appeared to be proving effective in reducing the present scale of infiltration the Communist probably would increase their use of the mountain trail system through Cambodia. This is a longer and more difficult route but its use could keep at least minimum support flowing to the Viet Cong. At the same time, in order to reduce the apparent success of the SEATO action, they could intensify small unit attacks, assassinations, and local terrorism in South Vietnam; they could also commit more DRV irregular personnel for the harassment of the SEATO forces. In any event, the SEATO commitment in South Vietnam would probably have to be continued over a prolonged period. It might be part of Communist tactics to play upon possible SEATO weariness over maintaining substantial forces and accepting losses, in South Vietnam over a long period of time...

The reaction to the assumed SEATO action among concerned non-Communist governments would vary widely. The Asian members of SEATO would find renewed confidence in the organization and the US, if the plan were to go well. If, on the other hand, the SEATO action were to become costly, prolonged, or to involve heavy casualties, the Asian members would soon become disenchanted and look to the US to 'do something' to lessen the burden and to solve the problem. The UK and France would be likely to oppose the assumed SEATO action, and their reluctance to participate could be overcome only with great difficulty, if at all.

In this instance, and as we will see, later, the Intelligence Community's estimates of the likely results of U.S. moves are conspicuously more pessimistic (and more realistic) than the other staff papers presented to the President. This SNIE was based on an assumption that the SEATO force would total about 25,000 men. It is hard to imagine a more sharp contrast than between this paper, which foresees no serious impact on the insurgency from proposed intervention, and Supplemental Note 2, to be quoted next.



2. "Supplemental Note 2" to the paper, issued the day of the NSC meeting, contained, among other comments, a JCS estimate of the size of the American force needed "to clean up the Viet Cong threat." It reads:

Wider Military Implications. As the basic paper indicates, the likelihood of massive DRV and Chicom intervention cannot be estimated with precision. The SNIE covers only the initial phase when action might be limited to 20-25,000 men. At later stages, when the JCS estimate that 40,000 US forces will be needed to clean up the Viet Cong threat, the chances of such massive intervention might well become substantial, with the Soviets finding it a good opportunity to tie down major US forces in a long action, perhaps as part of a multi-prong action involving Berlin and such additional areas as Korea and Iran.

Because of this possibility of major Bloc intervention, the maximum possible force needs must be frankly faced. Assuming present estimates of about 40,000 US forces for the stated military objective in South Vietnam, plus 128,000 US forces for meeting North Vietnam and Chicom intervention, the drain on US-based reserve forces could be on the order of 3 or 4 divisions and other forces as well. The impact on naval capabilities for blockade plans (to meet Berlin) would also be major. In light of present Berlin contingency plans, and combat attrition, including scarce items of equipment, the initiation of the Vietnam action in itself should dictate a step up in the present mobilization, possibly of major proportions. 7/

3. Finally, there is the following memo from William Bundy (then acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, ISA) to McNamara. It is of interest because it is the only piece of paper available for this period that gives anyone's candid recommendations to his boss, as opposed to the more formal staff papers:

Even if the decision at tomorrow's meeting is only preliminary -- to explore with Diem and the British, Australians, and New Zealanders would be my guess -- it is clearly of the greatest possible importance. Above all, action must proceed fast.

For what one man's feel is worth, mine -- based on very close touch with Indochina in the 1954 war and civil war afterwards till Diem took hold -- is that it is really now or never if we are to arrest the gains being made by the Viet Cong. Walt Rostow made the point yesterday that the Viet Cong are about to move, by every indication, from the small unit basis to a moderate battalion-size basis. Intelligence also suggests that they may try to set

up a 'provisional government' like Xieng Khuang (though less legitimate appearing) in the very Kontum area into which the present initial plan would move SEATO forces. If the Viet Cong movement 'blooms' in this way, it will almost certainly attract all the back-the-winner sentiment that understandably prevails in such cases and that beat the French in early 1954 and came within an ace of beating Diem in early 1955.

An early and hard-hitting operation has a good chance (70% would be my guess) of arresting things and giving Diem a chance to do better and clean up. Even if we follow up hard, on the lines the JCS are working out after yesterday's meeting, however, the chances are not much better that we will in fact be able to clean up the situation. It all depends on Diem's effectiveness, which is very problematical. The 30% chance is that we would wind up like the French in 1954; white men can't win this kind of fight.

On a 70-30 basis, I would myself favor going in. But if we let, say, a month go by before we move, the odds will slide (both short-term shock effect and long-term chance) down to 60-40, 50-50 and so on. Laos under a Souvanna Phouma deal is more likely than not to go sour, and will more and more make things difficult in South Viet-Nam, which again underscores the element of time. 8/

Minutes of the NSC meeting of October 11 were not available for this study. But we have the following Gilpatrick memorandum for the record. (The JUNGLE JIM squadron -- 12 planes -- was an Air Force unit specially trained for counter-insurgency warfare. Short of engaging in combat itself, presumably it would be used to train Vietnamese pilots):

At this morning's meeting with the President the following course of action was agreed upon with relation to South Vietnam:

1. The Defense Department is authorized to send the Air Force's Jungle Jim Squadron into Vietnam to serve under the MAAG as a training mission and not for combat at the present time.

2. General Maxwell Taylor accompanied by Dr. Rostow from the White House, General Lansdale, a representative of JCS, Mr. Cottrell from State and probably someone from ISA will leave for Vietnam over the weekend on a Presidential mission (to be announced by the President at this afternoon's press conference as an economic survey) to look into the feasibility from both political and military standpoints of the following:



(a) the plan for military intervention discussed at this morning's meeting on the basis of the Vietnam task force paper entitled 'Concept for Intervention in Vietnam';

(b) an alternative plan for stationing in Vietnam fewer U.S. combat forces than those called for under the plan referred to in (a) above and with a more limited objective than dealing with the Viet Cong; in other words, such a small force would probably go in at Tourane [DaNang] and possibly another southern port principally for the purpose of establishing a U.S. 'presence' in Vietnam;

(c) other alternatives in lieu of putting any U.S. combat forces in Vietnam, i.e. stepping up U.S. assistance and training of Vietnam units, furnishing of more U.S. equipment, particularly helicopters and other light aircraft, trucks and other ground transport, etc.

3. During the two or three weeks that will be required for the completion of General Taylor's mission, State will push ahead with the following political actions:

(a) protest to the ICC on the step-up in North Vietnamese support of Viet Cong activities,

(b) tabling at the UN a white paper based on Mr. William Jordan's report concerning Communist violations of the Geneva Accords, and

(c) consultation with our SEATO allies, principally the British and Australians, regarding SEATO actions in support of the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. 9/

That afternoon, the President announced the Taylor Mission, but he did not make the hardly credible claim that he was sending his personal military advisor to Vietnam to do an economic survey. He made a general announcement, and was non-committal when asked whether Taylor was going to consider the need for combat troops (there had been leaked stories in the newspapers a few days earlier that the Administration was considering such a move.) Nevertheless, the newspaper stories the next day flatly asserted that the President had said Taylor was going to study the need for U.S. combat troops, which was, of course, true, although not exactly what the President had said. 10/

## II. THE NEWSPAPERS AND THE CABLES

The day after Kennedy's announcement of the Taylor mission, Reuters sent this dispatch from Saigon:

Saigon, Vietnam, Oct 12 (Reuters) -- South Vietnamese military sources welcomed today President Kennedy's decision to send his military adviser, General Taylor, here this week.

Sources close to President Ngo Dinh Diem said he did not feel there was a need here yet for troops of the United States or Southeast Asia Treaty Organization.

The sources said the South Vietnamese President was convinced that Vietnam's Army increased in size and better equipped by increased United States aid can defeat the Communists. 11/

But a day later, the public position of the Vietnamese had shifted noticeably. From a New York Times dispatch from Saigon:

One question receiving considerable attention here in the light of the Taylor mission is the desirability of sending United States troops to South Vietnam.

The prospect of United States troop involvement is understood to have advanced a step here in the sense that the South Vietnamese Government is reported to be willing to consider such involvement which it had formerly rejected.

However, it is understood that South Vietnamese deliberations still fall far short of the stage wherein Saigon would be ready to request United States forces. 12/

But in private discussions with the U.S. ambassador, Diem had turned around completely. From Nolting's cable:

Following major requests:

- (1) An additional squadron of AD-6 fighter bombers (in lieu of programmed T-28's) and delivery as soon as possible.
- (2) The sending of US civilian contract pilots for helicopters and transport planes (C-47s), for 'non-combat' operations.
- (3) US combat unit or units to be introduced into SVN as 'combat-trainer units'. Proposed use would be to station a part of this force in northern part of SVN near 17th parallel to free ARVN forces presently there for anti-guerrilla combat in high plateau. Thuan also suggested possibility stationing some US forces in several provincial seats in highlands of central Vietnam.



(4) US reaction to proposal to request govt Nationalist China to send one division of combat troops for operations in southwest provinces.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Thuan raised question of US combat-trainer units, I asked specifically whether this was President's considered request, mentioning his oft-repeated views re US combat forces here. Thuan confirmed that this was considered request from President; confirmed that Diem's views had changed in light of worsening situation. Idea was to have 'symbolic' US strength near 17th parallel, which would serve to prevent attack there and free up GVN forces now stationed there for combat operations; Thuan said President Diem also thought similar purpose could be achieved by stationing US combat units in several provincial seats in highlands, thus freeing ARVN guard forces there. I told him this represented major request coming on heels of President Diem's request for bilateral security treaty with United States. I asked whether this request was in lieu of the security treaty. Thuan first said that it represented a first step, which would be quicker than a treaty, and that time was of essence. After some discussion of the pro's and con's of a possible defense treaty (effect on SEATO, ICC, ratification procedures, etc.), Thuan said he felt that proposal for stationing token US forces in SVN would satisfy GVN and would serve the purpose better than a mutual defense treaty. (He had evidently not thought through this nor discussed it with Diem.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Nolting then indicated he reacted skeptically to Diem's suggestion of bringing in Chiang's forces, and comments to Washington that he thought "this was a trial balloon only." He concluded the cable:

The above questions will undoubtedly be raised with Gen Taylor. While it is obvious that GVN is losing no opportunity to ask for additional support as result our greater interest and concern this area, situation here, both militarily and psychologically, has moved in my judgment to point where serious and prompt consideration should be given to these requests. 13/

This cable arrived in Washington the night of October 13. The following day an unidentified source provided the New York Times with a detailed explanation of what the Taylor Mission was to do. From the way the Times handled the story it is plain that it came from a source authorized to speak for the President, and probably from the President himself. The gist of the story was that Taylor was going to Saigon to look into all sorts of things, one of which, near the bottom of the list, was the question of U.S. troops at some time in the indefinite future. Along with a lot of more

immediate questions about intelligence and such, Taylor was expected to "...recommend long-range programs, including possible military actions, but stressing broad economic and social measures." Furthermore, the Times was told,

Military leaders at the Pentagon, no less than General Taylor himself are understood to be reluctant to send organized U.S. combat units into Southeast Asia. Pentagon plans for this area stress the importance of countering Communist guerrillas with troops from the affected countries, perhaps trained and equipped by the U.S., but not supplanted by U.S. troops. 14/

In the light of the recommendations quoted throughout this paper, and particularly of the staff papers just described that led up to the Taylor Mission, most of this was simply untrue. It is just about inconceivable that this story could have been given out except at the direction of the President, or by him personally. It appears, consequently, the President was less than delighted by Diem's request for troops. He may have suspected, quite reasonably, that Diem's request was prompted by the stories out of Washington that Taylor was coming to discuss troops; or he may have wished to put a quick stop to expectations (and leaks) that troops were about to be sent, or both. This does not mean the President had already decided not to send combat units. Presumably he had not. But he apparently did not want to have his hands tied.

The Times story had the apparently desired affect. Speculation about combat troops almost disappeared from news stories, and Diem never again raised the question of combat troops: the initiative from now on came from Taylor and Nolting, and their recommendations were very closely held.

### III. CINCPAC RECOMMENDS "NOT NOW"

On the way to Saigon, Taylor stopped off in Hawaii to talk to Admiral Felt at CINCPAC. Felt did not give Taylor a flat recommendation on combat troops at the time. But a couple of days later he cabled Washington a list of pros and cons:

#### A. Pro

(1) Presence of U.S. forces in SVN, particularly if deployed to important defensive areas such as plateau region, would mean to Communists that overt aggression against SVN will involve US forces from the outset. This eliminates possibility of sudden victory by overt aggression in SVN before US could react. This would settle the question for SVN, and SE Asians as a whole, as to whether we would come to their help. Further, agreement by SEATO to principle of force introduction would strengthen SEATO in world eyes.



(2) Presence of strong U.S. combat forces will influence greatly South Vietnamese will to eliminate the Viet Cong.

(3) If we use U.S. engineers with U.S. military protection to finish Dakto-Ban Net-Attapeu Road in order to enable US to operate near plateau border area, a military corridor of sorts will cut an important part of VC pipeline from north.

(4) U.S. forces will make available larger number ARVN forces for employment against VC. RVNAF tasks accomplished by U.S. forces will decrease proportionately certain RVNAF deficiencies, particularly in logistics, communications, and air support.

(5) U.S. forces in SVN would tend to strengthen Diem's government against pro-Red coup, but would not necessarily preclude non-Communist coup attempts.

(6) Dividends would accrue from fact our troops could provide variety training for ARVN forces, broadening base now provided by MAAG.

#### B. Con-

(1) Would stir up big fuss throughout Asia about reintroduction of forces of white colonialism into SE Asia. Little question that a propaganda issue will be made of this in all world forums including UN.

(2) Action could trigger intensification of Commie aggression against SE Asia. This may not be all-out overt aggression, but could consist, for example, of the DRV moving full blown combat units through the mountain passes into southern Laos under excuse that we initiated invasion of SE Asia and they are protecting the flank of North Vietnam.

(3) Politically, presence of U.S. forces could hasten Commies to establish so called "representative government" in South Vietnam.

(4) Aside from offering Viet Cong a political target, US troops would constitute provocative military one, inducing VC to attack/harass it in manner/degree where issue might ultimately force American units active military campaign, or suffer defensive alternative of being pot-shot at to point of embarrassment.

(5) Presence of US troops could induce Commies to resort to related actions such as introduction of Red Air Force elements

in North Vietnam and accelerate modernization of DRV military forces.

(6) This would probably mean garrisoning a U.S. division in SE Asia for an extended period of time in same sense as Army divisions in Korea. However, circumstances differ from Korea. For example, nature of VC warfare such that US units cannot remain long in isolation from conflict realities. Ultimately, they likely to be forced into varying forms of military engagement with VC if only for security against attacks ranging from assassination/sabotage to tactical harassment. In short, we should accept fact that likelihood our troops becoming combat engaged increases in proportion to duration of their stay.

2. A summary of the above appears to me to add up in favor of our not introducing U.S. combat forces until we have exhausted other means for helping Diem. 15/

#### IV. TAYLOR IN SAIGON

The Taylor Mission arrived in Saigon on the 18th. They had barely arrived when Diem went before his National Assembly to declare that the increasing gravity of the Viet Cong threat now required a formal proclamation of a State of Emergency. Diem then went off to meet with the Americans, and after such a spectacular opening shot must have then astonished his visitors by indicating that he did not want American combat troops after all. What he wanted, he said, was the treaty, American support for larger GVN forces, and a list of combat support items that nicely paralleled those Rostow listed in the note to McNamara quoted earlier. It was Taylor (according to Nolting's cable 516, 20 October) who brought up the question of American combat troops.

Taylor said he understood there had been recent discussions of introduction of American or SEATO forces into Viet-Nam and asked why change had occurred in earlier GVN attitude. Diem succinctly replied because of Laos situation. Noting it will take time to build up GVN forces he pointed to enemy's reinforcements through infiltration and increased activities in central Viet-Nam and expressed belief that enemy is trying to escalate proportionally to increase in GVN forces so that GVN will not gain advantage. He asked specifically for tactical aviation, helicopter companies, coastal patrol forces and logistic support (ground transport).

Diem indicated he thought there would be no particular adverse psychological effect internally from introducing American forces since in his view Vietnamese people regard Communist attack on Viet-Nam as international problem. Rostow inquired whether internal and external political aspects such move could



be helped if it were shown clearly to world that this is international problem. Diem gave no direct comment on this suggestion. He indicated two main aspects of this problem: (1) Vietnamese people are worried about absence formal commitment by US to Viet-Nam. They fear that if situation deteriorates Viet-Nam might be abandoned by US. If troops are introduced without a formal commitment they can be withdrawn at any time and thus formal commitment is even more important in psychological sense. (2) Contingency plan should be prepared re use American forces in Viet-Nam at any time this may become necessary. In this connection Diem seemed to be talking about combat forces. While it was not completely clear what Diem has in mind at present time he seemed to be saying that he wants bilateral defense treaty and preparation of plans for use American forces (whatever is appropriate) but under questioning he did not repeat his earlier idea relayed to me by Thuan that he wanted combat forces. 16/

Here, as earlier, we get no explicit statement on Washington's attitude toward a treaty. Further, no strong conclusion can be drawn from the fact that Taylor took the initiative in raising the issue of troops, since it might have been awkward not to mention the issue at all after Thuan's presentation to Nolting a few days previous.

But on the 23rd, we find this in a cable from MAAG Chief McGarr:

Serious flood in Mekong delta area...(worst since 1937) raises possibility that flood relief could be justification for moving in US military personnel for humanitarian purposes with subsequent retention if desirable. Gen. Taylor and Ambassador evaluating feasibility and desirability. 16a/

Taylor met with Diem and Thuan again the following day, the 24th. Taylor provided the Vietnamese a written summary of items he described as "personal ideas to which I was seeking their reaction." Item E was headed "Introduction of U.S. Combat troops." It proposed "a flood relief task force, largely military in composition, to work with GVN over an extended period of rehabilitation of areas. Such a force might contain engineer, medical, signal, and transportation elements as well as combat troops for the protection of relief operations." Diem now seems to have changed his mind again on combat troops. Here is the cable:

1. The essential conclusions which we have reached at the end of a week of briefings, consultations, and field trips follow:

A. There is a critical political-military situation in SVN brought on by western policy in Laos and by the continued build-up of the VC and their recent successful attacks. These circumstances coupled

with the major flood disaster in the southwestern provinces have combined to create a deep and pervasive crisis of confidence and a serious loss in national morale.

B. In the field, the military operations against the VC are ineffective because of the absence of reliable intelligence on the enemy, an unclear and unresponsive channel of command responsibility in the Armed Forces, and the tactical immobility of the VN ground forces. This immobility leads to a system of passive, fragmented defense conceding the initiative to the enemy and leaving him free to pick the targets of attack. The harassed population exposed to these attacks turn to the government for better protection and the latter responds by assigning more static missions to the Army units, thus adding to their immobility. In the end, the Army is allowed neither to train nor to fight but awaits enemy attacks in relative inaction.

C. The situation in the Saigon is volatile but, while morale is down and complaints against the government are rife, there is not hard evidence of a likely coup against Diem. He still has no visible rival or replacement.

2. To cope with the foregoing situation, we are considering recommending a number of possible forms of GVN-US cooperation to reverse the present downward trend, stimulate an offensive spirit and buildup morale. In company with Ambassador Nolting, Dr. Rostow and Mr. Mendenhall, I discussed some of these Oct 24 with Diem and Thuan, advancing them as personal ideas to which I was seeking their informal reaction. The following outline, distributed in French translation at the start of the interview, indicates the scope of the discussion.

A. Improvement of intelligence on V.C.: the available intelligence on V.C. insurgency is inadequate both for tactical requirements and for basis of judgment of situation at governmental levels. A joint GVN-US effort should be able to improve organization, techniques and end product to mutual advantage both parties.

B. Joint survey of security situation at provincial level: The current situation can best be appraised at provincial level where the basic intelligence is found, the incidents occur, and the defenses are tested. The problems vary from province to province and hence require local analysis on the spot. Such a survey should result in better understanding of such important matters as quality of basic intelligence on V.C., needs of civil guard and self defense corps, command relationships between provincial and Army officials and conditions under which assumption of offensive might be possible.

C. Improvement of Army mobility: it appears that size of ARVN can not be much increased before end 1962; to make it more



effective and allow it to cope with increasing number of V.C., it must be given greater mobility. Such mobility can come from two sources, (1) freeing Army from static missions and (2) making available to it improved means of transport, notably helicopters and light aircraft. Both methods should be considered.

D. Blocking infiltration into high plateau: increase in enemy forces in high plateau requires special measures for defense and for counter-guerrilla actions. It is suggested that a carefully tailored "border ranger force" be organized from existing ranger units and introduced into the difficult terrain along the Laos/Vietnam frontier for attack and defense against the Viet Cong. This force should be trained and equipped for extended service on the frontier and for operations against the communications lines of the VC who have infiltrated into the high plateau and adjacent areas.

E. Introduction of U.S. Military Forces: GVN is faced with major civil problem arising from flood devastation in western provinces. Its allies should offer help to GVN according to their means. In the case of U.S., two ways of rendering help should be considered. One is of emergency type, such as offer of U.S. military helicopters for reconnaissance of conditions of flooded areas and for emergency delivery medical supplies and like. A more significant contribution might be a flood relief task force, largely military in composition, to work with GVN over an extended period for rehabilitation of area. Such a force might contain engineer, medical, signal, and transportation elements as well as combat troops for the protection of relief operations. Obviously, such a military source would also provide U.S. military presence in Viet Nam and would constitute military reserve in case of heightened military crisis.

F. Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war: we should consider jointly all possible measures to emphasize turning point has been reached in dealing with Communist aggression. Possible actions might include appeal to United Nations, an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis and exchange of letters between the two heads of State expressing their partnership in a common cause.

3. Diem's reaction on all points was favorable. He expressed satisfaction with idea of introducing U.S. forces in connection with flood relief activities, observing that even the opposition elements in this Congress had joined with the majority in supporting need for presence of U.S. forces. In the course of the meeting, nothing was formally proposed or approved but the consensus was that the points considered might form framework for a program of increased GVN-US cooperation offering promise of overcoming many of the current difficulties of GVN. There were no specific figures discussed with regard to such matters as troop strengths, additional equipment, or flood relief...

5. Because of the importance of acting rapidly once we have made up our minds, I will cable my recommendations to Washington enroute home. 17/

Simultaneously with this cable, Taylor sent a second "eyes only" for the President, Chairman of the JCS, Director of CIA, McNamara, and Rusk and Alexis Johnson at State. The cable is a little confusing; for although it sets out to comment on "U.S. military forces" it concerns only the flood Task Force, not mentioning the various other types of military forces (helicopter companies, etc.) which were envisioned. The same slight confusion appears in the "eyes only for the President" cable on this issue to be quoted shortly. The impression Taylor's choice of language leaves is that the support forces (helicopter companies, expanded MAAG, etc.) he was recommending were essentially already agreed to by the President before Taylor left Washington, and consequently his detailed justification went only to the kind of forces on which a decision was yet to be made -- that is, ground forces liable to become involved in direct engagements with the Viet Cong.

Here is the cable from Saigon, followed by the two "Eyes only for the President" from the Philippines which sum up his "fundamental conclusions."

FROM SAIGON

WHITE HOUSE EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT  
STATE EYES ONLY FOR RUSK AND UNDER SECRETARY JOHNSON  
DEFENSE EYES ONLY SECRETARY McNAMARA  
JCS EYES ONLY GENERAL LEMNITZER  
FROM GENERAL TAYLOR

\* \* \* \* \*

With regard to the critical question of introducing U.S. military forces into VN:

My view is that we should put in a task force consisting largely of logistical troops for the purpose of participating in flood relief and at the same time of providing a U.S. military presence in VN capable of assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong or Viet Minh. To relate the introduction of these troops to the needs of flood relief seems to me to offer considerable advantages in VN and abroad. It gives a specific humanitarian task as the prime reason for the coming of our troops and avoids any suggestion that we are taking over responsibility for the security of the country. As the task is a specific one, we can extricate our troops when it is done if we so desire. Alternatively, we can phase them into other activities if we wish to remain longer.

The strength of the force I have in mind on the order of 6-8000 troops. Its initial composition should be worked out here after study of the



possible requirements and conditions for its use and subsequent modifications made with experience.

In addition to the logistical component, it will be necessary to include some combat troops for the protection of logistical operations and the defense of the area occupied by U.S. forces. Any troops coming to VN may expect to take casualties.

Needless to say, this kind of task force will exercise little direct influence on the campaign against the V.C. It will, however, give a much needed shot in the arm to national morale, particularly if combined with other actions showing that a more effective working relationship in the common cause has been established between the GVN and the U.S. 18/

FROM THE PHILIPPINES

EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM GENERAL TAYLOR

1. Transmitted herewith are a summary of the fundamental conclusions of my group and my personal recommendations in response to the letter of the President to me dated 13 October 1961. \* \* \* \* \*

2. It is concluded that:

a. Communist strategy aims to gain control of Southeast Asia by methods of subversion and guerrilla war which by-pass conventional U.S. and indigenous strength on the ground. The interim Communist goal -- en route to total take-over -- appears to be a neutral Southeast Asia, detached from U.S. protection. This strategy is well on the way to success in Vietnam.

b. In Vietnam (and Southeast Asia) there is a double crisis in confidence: doubt that U.S. is determined to save Southeast Asia; doubt that Diem's methods can frustrate and defeat Communist purposes and methods. The Vietnamese (and Southeast Asians) will undoubtedly draw -- rightly or wrongly -- definitive conclusions in coming weeks and months concerning the probable outcome and will adjust their behavior accordingly. What the U.S. does or fails to do will be decisive to the end result.

c. Aside from the morale factor, the Vietnamese Government is caught in interlocking circles of bad tactics and bad administrative arrangements which pin their forces on the defensive in ways which permit a relatively small Viet-Cong force (about one-tenth the size of the GVN regulars) to create conditions of frustration and terror certain to lead to a political crisis, if a positive turning point is

not soon achieved. The following recommendations are designed to achieve that favorable turn, to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam, and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence.

3. It is recommended:

General

a. That upon request from the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to come to its aid in resisting the increasing aggressions of the Viet-Cong and in repairing the ravages of the Delta flood which, in combination, threaten the lives of its citizens and the security of the country, the U.S. Government offer to join the GVN in a massive joint effort as a part of a total mobilization of GVN resources to cope with both the Viet-Cong (VC) and the ravages of the flood. The U.S. representatives will participate actively in this effort, particularly in the fields of government administration, military plans and operations, intelligence, and flood relief, going beyond the advisory role which they have observed in the past.

Specific

b. That in support of the foregoing broad commitment to a joint effort with Diem, the following specific measures be undertaken:

(1) The U.S. Government will be prepared to provide individual administrators for insertion into the governmental machinery of South Vietnam in types and numbers to be worked out with President Diem.

(2) A joint effort will be made to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the government and armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

(3) The U.S. Government will engage in a joint survey of the conditions in the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them. As this survey will consume time, it should not hold back the immediate actions which are clearly needed regardless of its outcome.

(4) A joint effort will be made to free the Army for mobile, offensive operations. This effort will be based upon improving the training and equipping of the Civil Guard and the



Self-Defense Corps, relieving the regular Army of static missions, raising the level of the mobility of Army Forces by the provision of considerably more helicopters and light aviation, and organizing a Border Ranger Force for a long-term campaign on the Laotian border against the Viet-Cong infiltrators. The U.S. Government will support this effort with equipment and with military units and personnel to do those tasks which the Armed Forces of Vietnam cannot perform in time. Such tasks include air reconnaissance and photography, airlift (beyond the present capacity of SVN forces), special intelligence, and air-ground support techniques.

(5) The U.S. Government will assist the GVN in effecting surveillance and control over the coastal waters and inland waterways, furnishing such advisors, operating personnel and small craft as may be necessary for quick and effective operations.

(6) The MAAG, Vietnam, will be reorganized and increased in size as may be necessary by the implementation of these recommendations.

(7) The U.S. Government will offer to introduce into South Vietnam a military Task Force to operate under U.S. control for the following purposes:

(a) Provide a U.S. military presence capable of raising national morale and of showing to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the U.S. intent to resist a Communist take-over.

(b) Conduct logistical operations in support of military and flood relief operations.

(c) Conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which they are stationed.

(d) Provide an emergency reserve to back up the Armed Forces of the GVN in the case of a heightened military crisis.

(e) Act as an advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced if CINCPAC or SEATO contingency plans are invoked.

(8) The U.S. Government will review its economic aid program to take into account the needs of flood relief and to give priority to those projects in support of the expanded counter-insurgency program. 19/

Eyes Only for the President from General Taylor.

This message is for the purpose of presenting my reasons for recommending the introduction of a U.S. military force into South Vietnam (SVN). I have reached the conclusion that this is an essential action if we are to reverse the present downward trend of events in spite of a full recognition of the following disadvantages:

a. The strategic reserve of U.S. forces is presently so weak that we can ill afford any detachment of forces to a peripheral area of the Communist bloc where they will be pinned down for an uncertain duration.

b. Although U.S. prestige is already engaged in SVN, it will become more so by the sending of troops.

c. If the first contingent is not enough to accomplish the necessary results, it will be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce. If the ultimate result sought is the closing of the frontiers and the clean-up of the insurgents within SVN, there is no limit to our possible commitment (unless we attack the source in Hanoi).

d. The introduction of U.S. forces may increase tensions and risk escalation into a major war in Asia.

On the other side of the argument, there can be no action so convincing of U.S. seriousness of purpose and hence so reassuring to the people and Government of SVN and to our other friends and allies in SEA as the introduction of U.S. forces into SVN. The views of indigenous and U.S. officials consulted on our trip were unanimous on this point. I have just seen Saigon 545 to State and suggest that it be read in connection with this message. \*

The size of the U.S. force introduced need not be great to provide the military presence necessary to produce the desired effect on national morale in SVN and on international opinion. A bare token, however, will not suffice; it must have a significant value. The kinds of tasks which it might undertake which would have a significant value are suggested in BAGU0005 (previous cable, 3.b.(7)). They are:

(a) Provide a US military presence capable of raising national morale and of showing to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the US intent to resist a Communist take-over.

(b) Conduct logistical operations in support of military and flood relief operations.

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\* Quoted below, page 25



(c) Conduct such combat operations as are necessary for self-defense and for the security of the area in which they are stationed.

(d) Provide an emergency reserve to back up the Armed Forces of the GVN in the case of a heightened military crisis.

(e) Act as an advance party of such additional forces as may be introduced if CINCPAC or SEATO contingency plans are invoked.

It is noteworthy that this force is not proposed to clear the jungles and forests of Viet Cong guerrillas. That should be the primary task of the Armed Forces of Vietnam for which they should be specifically organized, trained, and stiffened with ample U.S. advisors down to combat battalion levels. However, the U.S. troops may be called upon to engage in combat to protect themselves, their working parties, and the area in which they live. As a general reserve, they might be thrown into action (with U.S. agreement) against large, formed guerrilla bands which have abandoned the forests for attacks on major targets. But in general, our forces should not engage in small-scale guerrilla operations in the jungle.

As an area for the operations of U.S. troops, SVN is not an excessively difficult or unpleasant place to operate. While the border areas are rugged and heavily forested, the terrain is comparable to parts of Korea where U.S. troops learned to live and work without too much effort. However, these border areas, for reasons stated above, are not the places to engage our forces. In the High Plateau and in the coastal plain where U.S. troops would probably be stationed, these jungle-forest conditions do not exist to any great extent. The most unpleasant feature in the coastal areas would be the heat and, in the Delta, the mud left behind by the flood. The High Plateau offers no particular obstacle to the stationing of U.S. troops.

The extent to which the Task Force would engage in flood relief activities in the Delta will depend upon further study of the problem there. As reported in Saigon 537, I see considerable advantages in playing up this aspect of the Task Force mission. I am presently inclined to favor a dual mission, initially help to the flood area and subsequently use in any other area of SVN where its resources can be used effectively to give tangible support in the struggle against the Viet Cong. However, the possibility of emphasizing the humanitarian mission will wane if we wait long in moving in our forces or in linking our stated purpose with the emergency conditions created by the flood.

The risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive. NVN is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing, a weakness which should be exploited diplomatically in

convincing Hanoi to lay off SVN. Both the DRV and the Chicoms would face severe logistical difficulties in trying to maintain strong forces in the field in SEA, difficulties which we share but by no means to the same degree. There is no case for fearing a mass onslaught of Communist manpower into SVN and its neighboring states, particularly if our airpower is allowed a free hand against logistical targets. Finally, the starvation conditions in China should discourage Communist leaders there from being militarily venturesome for some time to come.

By the foregoing line of reasoning, I have reached the conclusion that the introduction of a U.S. military Task Force without delay offers definitely more advantage than it creates risks and difficulties. In fact, I do not believe that our program to save SVN will succeed without it. If the concept is approved, the exact size and composition of the force should be determined by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the JCS, the Chief MAAG, and CINCPAC. My own feeling is that the initial size should not exceed about 8000, of which a preponderant number would be in logistical-type units. After acquiring experience in operating in SVN, this initial force will require reorganization and adjustment to the local scene.

As CINCPAC will point out, any forces committed to SVN will need to be replaced by additional forces to his area from the strategic reserve in the U.S. Also, any troops to SVN are in addition to those which may be required to execute SEATO Plan 5. Both facts should be taken into account in current considerations of the FY 1963 budget which bear upon the permanent increase which should be made in the U.S. military establishment to maintain our strategic position for the long pull. 20/

These cables, it will be noticed, are rather sharply focused on the insurgency as a problem reducible to fairly conventional military technique and tactics. Together with the cables from Saigon, the impression is given that the major needs are getting the Army to take the offensive, building up a much better intelligence setup, and persuading Diem to loosen up Administrative impediments to effective use of his forces.

#### V. THE TAYLOR REPORT

A report of the Taylor Mission was published November 3, in the form of a black loose-leaf notebook containing a letter of transmittal of more than routine significance, a 25-page "Evaluation and Conclusions," then a series of memoranda by members of the mission. Of these, the most important, of course, were the Taylor cables, which, being "Eyes only for the President," were deleted from all but one or a very few copies of the report. There is no separate paper from Rostow, and his views presumably are reflected in the unsigned summary paper.



The impression the "Evaluation" paper gives is more easily summarized than its details. For the impression is clearly one of urgency combined with optimism. Essentially, it says South Vietnam is in serious trouble; major interests of the United States are at stake; but if the U.S. promptly and energetically takes up the challenge, a victory can be had without a U.S. take-over of the war.

For example:

Despite the intellectuals who sit on the side lines and complain; despite serious dissidence among the Montagnards, the sects, and certain old Viet Minh areas; despite the apathy and fear of the Viet-Cong in the countryside, the atmosphere in South Vietnam is, on balance, one of frustrated energy rather than passive acceptance of inevitable defeat.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that time has nearly run out for converting these assets into the bases for victory. Diem himself--and all concerned with the fate of the country--are looking to American guidance and aid to achieve a turning point in Vietnam's affairs. From all quarters in Southeast Asia the message on Vietnam is the same: vigorous American action is needed to buy time for Vietnam to mobilize and organize its real assets; but the time for such a turn around has nearly run out. And if Vietnam goes, it will be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to hold Southeast Asia. What will be lost is not merely a crucial piece of real estate, but the faith that the U.S. has the will and the capacity to deal with the Communist offensive in that area. 21/

The report, drawing on the appendices, includes a wide range of proposals. But the major emphasis, very emphatically, is on two ideas: First, there must be a firm, unambiguous military commitment to remove doubts about U.S. resolve arising out of the Laos negotiations; second, there is great emphasis on the idea that the Diem regime's own evident weaknesses--from "the famous problem of Diem as administrator" to the Army's lack of offensive spirit--could be cured if enough dedicated Americans, civilian and military, became involved in South Vietnam to show the South Vietnamese, at all levels, how to get on and win the war. The much-urged military Task Force, for example, was mainly to serve the first purpose, but partly also to serve the second: "the presence of American military forces in the [flood] area should also give us an opportunity to work intensively with the civil guards and with other local military elements and to explore the possibility of suffusing them with an offensive spirit and tactics." 22/

Here are a few extracts which give the flavor of the discussion:

"It is evident that morale in Vietnam will rapidly crumble -- and in Southeast Asia only slightly less quickly -- if the sequence of expectations set in motion by Vice President Johnson's visit and climaxed by General Taylor's mission are not soon followed by a hard U.S. commitment to the ground in Vietnam." [Emphasis added]

"The elements required for buying time and assuming the offensive in Vietnam are, in the view of this mission, the following:

1. A quick U.S. response to the present crisis which would demonstrate by deeds -- not merely words -- the American commitment seriously to help save Vietnam rather than to disengage in the most convenient manner possible. To be persuasive this commitment must include the sending to Vietnam of some U.S. military forces.

2. A shift in the American relation to the Vietnamese effort from advice to limited partnership. The present character and scale of the war in South Vietnam decree that only the Vietnamese can defeat the Viet Cong; but at all levels Americans must, as friends and partners -- not as arms-length advisors -- show them how the job might be done -- not tell them or do it for them. 23/

\* \* \* \* \*

"Perhaps the most striking aspect of this mission's effort is the unanimity of view -- individually arrived at by the specialists involved -- that what is now required is a shift from U.S. advice to limited partnership and working collaboration with the Vietnamese. The present war cannot be won by direct U.S. action; it must be won by the Vietnamese. But there is a general conviction among us that the Vietnamese performance in every domain can be substantially improved if Americans are prepared to work side by side with the Vietnamese on the key problems. Moreover, there is evidence that Diem is, in principle, prepared for this step, and that most -- not all -- elements in his establishment are eagerly awaiting it." 24/

Here is a section titled "Reforming Diem's Administrative Method":

The famous problem of Diem as an administrator and politician could be resolved in a number of ways:

-- By his removal in favor of a military dictatorship which would give dominance to the military chain of command.

-- By his removal in favor of a figure of more dilute power (e.g., Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho) who would delegate authority to act to both military and civil leaders.



-- By bringing about a series of de facto administrative changes via persuasion at high levels; collaboration with Diem's aides who want improved administration; and by a U.S. operating presence at many working levels, using the U.S. presence (e.g., control over the helicopter squadrons) for forcing the Vietnamese to get their house in order in one area after another.

We have opted for the third choice, on the basis of both merit and feasibility.

Our reasons for these: First, it would be dangerous for us to engineer a coup under present tense circumstances, since it is by no means certain that we could control its consequences and potentialities for Communist exploitation. Second, we are convinced that a part of the complaint about Diem's administrative methods conceals a lack of first-rate executives who can get things done. In the endless debate between Diem and his subordinates (Diem complaining of limited executive material; his subordinates, of Diem's bottleneck methods) both have hold of a piece of the truth.

The proposed strategy of limited partnership is designed both to force clear delegation of authority in key areas and to beef up Vietnamese administration until they can surface and develop the men to take over.

This is a difficult course to adopt. We can anticipate some friction and reluctance until it is proved that Americans can be helpful partners and that the techniques will not undermine Diem's political position. Shifts in U.S. attitudes and methods of administration as well as Vietnamese are required. But we are confident that it is the right way to proceed at this stage; and, as noted earlier, there is reason for confidence if the right men are sent to do the right jobs. 25/

On many points the tone, and sometimes the substance, of the appendices by the lesser members of the Mission (with the exception of one by Lansdale) are in sharp contrast to the summary paper.

William Jorden of State begins a discussion of "the present situation" by reporting:

One after another, Vietnamese officials, military men and ordinary citizens spoke to me of the situation in their country as 'grave' and 'deteriorating.' They are distressed at the evidence of growing Viet Cong successes. They have lost confidence in President Diem and in his leadership. Men who only one

or two months ago would have hesitated to say anything critical of Diem, now explode in angry denunciation of the man, his family, and his methods.

And after a page of details, Jorden sums up with:

Intrigue, nepotism and even corruption might be accepted, for a time, if combined with efficiency and visible progress. When they accompany administrative paralysis and steady deterioration, they become intolerable. 26/

But the summary paper, under the heading of "The Assets of South Vietnam," lists:

With all his weaknesses, Diem has extraordinary ability, stubbornness, and guts.

Despite their acute frustration, the men of the Armed Forces and the administration respect Diem to a degree which gives their grumbling (and perhaps some plotting) a somewhat half-hearted character; and they are willing -- by and large -- to work for him, if he gives them a chance to do their jobs. 27/

The military annex contains this summary comment on the South Vietnamese Army:

The performance of the ARVN is disappointing and generally is characterized by a lack of aggressiveness and at most levels is devoid of a sense of urgency. The Army is short of able young trained leaders, both in the officer and NCO ranks. The basic soldier, as a result, is poorly trained, inadequately oriented, lacking in desire to close with the enemy and for the most part unaware of the serious inroads communist guerrillas are making in his country. 28/

But the main paper, again in the summary of South Vietnamese assets, reports that the South Vietnamese regulars are "of better quality than the Viet Cong Guerrillas." 29/

The point is not that the summary flatly contradicts the appendices. For example, the statement about the superior quality of ARVN, compared to the Viet Cong, is qualified with the remark "if it can bring the Communists to engagement," and can be explained to mean only that the more heavily armed ARVN could defeat a VC force in a set-piece battle. But the persistent tendency of the summary is to put Saigon's weaknesses in the best light, and avoid anything that might suggest that perhaps the U.S. should consider limiting, rather than increasing, its commitments to the Diem regime, or alternatively face up to a need to openly take over the war.



In contrast, the appendices contemplate (if not always recommend) the more drastic alternatives. The military appendix argues (in a paraphrase of the JCS position quoted earlier) that the U.S. ought to move into Southeast Asia, preferably Laos, in force. The appendix by Sterling Cottrell of State (Chairman of the Vietnam Task Force) suggests an opposite view:

Since it is an open question whether the GVN can succeed even with U.S. assistance, it would be a mistake for the U.S. to commit itself irrevocably to the defeat of the communists in SVN. 30/

And Cottrell, in the only explicit statement in the available record on why the U.S. would not want to give Diem the treaty he had asked for, states:

The Communist operation starts from the lowest social level -- the villages. The battle must be joined and won at this point. If not, the Communists will ultimately control all but the relatively few areas of strong military concentrations. Foreign military forces cannot themselves win the battle at the village level. Therefore, the primary responsibility for saving the country must rest with the GVN.

For the above reason, the U.S. should assist the GVN. This rules out any treaty or pact which either shifts ultimate responsibility to the U.S., or engages any full U.S. commitment to eliminate the Viet Cong threat. 31/

(And a treaty which did not apply to the Viet Cong threat would hardly be a very reassuring thing to Saigon; while one that did would face an uncertain future when it came to the Senate for ratification.)

Yet, Jorden and Cottrell had nothing much to recommend that was particularly different from what was recommended in the summary. The effect of their papers is to throw doubt on the prospects for success of the intervention proposed. But their recommendations come out about the same way, so that if their papers seem more realistic in hindsight than the main paper, they also seem more confused.

Cottrell, after recommending that the U.S. avoid committing itself irrevocably to winning in South Vietnam, goes on to recommend:

The world should continue to be impressed that this situation of overt DRV aggression, below the level of conventional warfare, must be stopped in the best interest of every free nation. 32/

The idea that, if worse comes to worst, the U.S. could probably save its position in Vietnam by bombing the north, seems to underlie a good deal of the optimism that pervades the summary paper. And even Cottrell, in the last of his recommendations, states:

If the combined U.S./GVN efforts are insufficient to reverse the trend, we should then move to the "Rostow Plan" of applying graduated measures on the DRV with weapons of our own choosing. 33/

Taylor, in his personal recommendations to the President (the cables from Baguio quoted earlier), spoke of the "extreme vulnerability of North Vietnam to conventional bombing."

The summary paper, in its contrast between the current war and the war the French lost, states:

Finally, the Communists now not only have something to gain -- the South -- but a base to lose -- the North -- if war should come. 34/

Bombing was not viewed as the answer to all problems. If things did not go well, the report saw a possible requirement for a substantial commitment of U.S. ground troops. In a section on South Vietnamese reserves, there is the comment that

...it is an evident requirement that the United States review quick action contingency plans to move into Vietnam, should the scale of the Vietnam/Viet Cong offensive radically increase at a time when Vietnamese reserves are inadequate to cope with it. Such action might be designed to take over the responsibility for the security of certain relatively quiet areas, if the battle remained at the guerrilla level, or to fight the Communists if open war were attempted. 35/

And the concluding paragraphs of the summary state that:

One of the major issues raised by this report is the need to develop the reserve strength in the U.S. establishment required to cover action in Southeast Asia up to the nuclear threshold in that area, as it is now envisaged. The call up of additional support forces may be required.

In our view, nothing is more calculated to sober the enemy and to discourage escalation in the face of the limited initiatives proposed here than the knowledge that the United States has prepared itself soundly to deal with aggression in Southeast Asia at any level. 36/



But these warnings were directed to an unexpectedly strong Viet Cong showing during the period of buildup of ARVN, and more still to deterring the likelihood of a Communist resumption of their offensive in Laos, or of an overt invasion of South Vietnam. The Vietnam contingencies; in particular, were not viewed as likely. But the possibility of bombing the North was viewed otherwise. The clearest statements are in General Taylor's letter of transmittal:

While we feel that the program recommended represents those measures which should be taken in our present knowledge of the situation in Southeast Asia, I would not suggest that it is the final word. Future needs beyond this program will depend upon the kind of settlement we obtain in Laos and the manner in which Hanoi decides to adjust its conduct to that settlement. If the Hanoi decision is to continue the irregular war declared on South Vietnam in 1959 with continued infiltration and covert support of guerrilla bands in the territory of our ally, we will then have to decide whether to accept as legitimate the continued guidance, training, and support of a guerrilla war across an international boundary, while the attacked react only inside their borders. Can we admit the establishment of the common law that the party attacked and his friends are denied the right to strike the source of aggression, after the fact of external aggression is clearly established? It is our view that our government should undertake with the Vietnamese the measures outlined herein, but should then consider and face the broader question beyond.

We cannot refrain from expressing, having seen the situation on the ground, our common sense of outrage at the burden which this kind of aggression imposes on a new country, only seven years old, with a difficult historical heritage to overcome, confronting the inevitable problems of political, social, and economic transition to modernization. It is easy and cheap to destroy such a country whereas it is difficult undisturbed to build a nation coming out of a complex past without carrying the burden of a guerrilla war.

We were similarly struck in Thailand with the injustice of subjecting this promising nation in transition to the heavy military burdens it faces in fulfilling its role in SEATO security planning along with the guerrilla challenge beginning to form up on its northeast frontier.

It is my judgment and that of my colleagues that the United States must decide how it will cope with Krushchev's "wars of liberation" which are really para-wars of guerrilla aggression.

This is a new and dangerous Communist technique which bypasses our traditional political and military responses. While the final answer lies beyond the scope of this report, it is clear to me that the time may come in our relations to Southeast Asia when we must declare our intention to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Vietnam and impose on the Hanoi Government a price for participating in the current war which is commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south. 37/



## VI. SOME CABLES FROM SAIGON

To a current reader, and very likely to the officials in Washington who had access to the full Taylor Mission Report (including Taylor's personal recommendations), there really seem to be three reports, not one.

1. Taylor's own cables read like, as of course they were, a soldier's crisp, direct analysis of the military problem facing the Saigon government. With regard to the Diem regime, the emphasis is on a need to build up intelligence capabilities, clear up administrative drags on efficient action, and take the offensive in seeking out and destroying VC units.

2. The main paper in the Report (the "Evaluations and Conclusions") incorporates General Taylor's views on the military problems. But, it is much broader, giving primary emphasis to the military problem, but also some attention to what we now call the "other war," and even more to conveying an essentially optimistic picture of the opportunities for a vigorous American effort to provide the South Vietnamese government and army with the elan and style needed to win. This paper was presumably drafted mainly by Rostow, with contributions from other members of the party.

It is consistent with Rostow's emphasis before and since on the Viet Cong problem as a pretty straight-forward case of external aggression. There is no indication of the doubts expressed in the Alexis Johnson "Concept of Intervention in Vietnam" paper that Diem might not be able to defeat the Viet Cong even if infiltration were largely cut off. At one point, for example, the paper tells its readers:

It must be remembered that the 1959 political decision in Hanoi to launch the guerrilla and political campaign of 1960-61 arose because of Diem's increasing success in stabilizing his rule and moving his country forward in the several preceding years. 38/

On the very next page (perhaps reflecting the vagaries of committee papers) the paper does not itself "remember" this description of conditions when the war started. For it states:

The military frustration of the past two months has...made acute, throughout his administration, dissatisfaction with Diem's method of rule, with his lack of identification with his people, and with his strategy which has been endemic for some years. 39/

But that seems only a momentary lapse from the general line of the paper, which is fairly reflected in the recommendation that we tell Moscow to:

use its influence with Ho Chi Minh to call his dogs off, mind his business, and feed his people. 40/

3. Finally, there were the appendices by the military and especially the State representatives on the Mission which, as indicated by the extracts given in the previous section, paint a much darker picture than the reader gets from the main paper. Even when, as is frequently the case, their recommendations are not much different from the main paper, the tone is one of trying to make the best of a bad situation, rather than of seizing an opportunity.

Because of these distinctions between the different parts of the Report, two people reading the full Report could come away with far different impressions of what sort of problem the U.S. was facing in Vietnam, depending on which parts of the Report seemed to them to ring truest. Presumably, officials' judgments here were influenced by their reading of the series of cables that arrived during and just after the Taylor visit, many of which touch on critical points of the report.

Here are some samples.

The day Taylor left, Nolting sent a cable describing the immediate mood in Saigon in pretty desperate terms. All parts of the Taylor Report, including the main paper, did the same. The distinctions in describing the situation were in how deep-rooted the immediate malaise was seen. The main effect of this cable from Nolting was presumably to add weight to the warning of the Report that something dramatic had to be done if the U.S. were not ready to risk a collapse in Saigon within a few months. As the Taylor Report stressed and the cable implies, the very fact of the Taylor Mission would have a very negative impact if nothing came out of it.

There has been noticeable rise in Saigon's political temperature during past week. Taylor visit, though reassuring in some respects, has been interpreted by many persons as demonstrating critical stage which VC insurgency has reached...Following deterioration of general security conditions over past two months cancellation October 26 national day celebrations to devote resources to flood relief and terse, dramatic declaration national emergency caught an unprepared public by surprise and contributed additional unsettling elements to growing atmosphere of uneasiness...

This growing public disquietude accompanied by increasing dissatisfaction with Diem's methods of administration on part senior GVN officials. There is considerable cabinet level criticism and growing though still inchoate determination force organizational reforms on President. Similar attitude seems be developing in ARVN upper levels. Though trend of thinking these groups taking parallel courses, there nothing indicate at this moment that collaboration between them taking place. Beginnings of this would, of course, be serious indicator something brewing.



At same time CAS [CIA] also has from Vietnamese government sources reports (C-3) of movement of certain platoon to company-size VC units (totalling perhaps 200-500 men) toward Saigon to profit from any disturbances or confusion which may occur. Knowledge these reports within GVN apparently tending deter disaffected officials from developing radical pace at this moment.

Situation here thus one of insecurity, uneasiness and emergent instability. A genuine and important military victory over VC would do more than anything else to redress balance and allay for moment high-level mutterings of need for change. On other hand, further deterioration of situation over next few weeks or months or new VC success similar Phuoc Hhanh incident might well bring situation to head. 41/

From MAAG Chief McGarr, Washington received an account of Taylor's meeting with "Big Minh," then Chief of Staff, later Head of State for a while after Diem was overthrown. It is interesting because it was one of the very few reports from Saigon in the available record suggesting that the Diem regime might be in need of more than administrative reforms. Minh complains that the Vietnamese army was "losing the support of the people" as indicated by a "marked decrease in the amount of information given by the population." He warned, further, that "GVN should discontinue favoring certain religions..." But McGarr stressed the administrative problems, particularly the need for an "overall plan." His reaction explicitly concerns what he saw as the "military" aspects of Minh's complaints. But Ambassador Nolting's cables and the main paper of the Report show a very similar tendency to take note of political problems, but put almost all the emphasis on the need for better military tactics and more efficient administrative arrangements.

...Big Minh was pessimistic and clearly and frankly outlined his personal feeling that the military was not being properly supported. He said not only Viet Cong grown alarmingly, but that Vietnamese armed forces were losing support of the people. As example, he pointed out marked decrease in amount of information given by population. Minh said GVN should discontinue favoring certain religions, and correct present system of selecting province chiefs. At this point Minh was extremely caustic in commenting on lack of ability, military and administrative, of certain province chiefs. Minh was bitter about province chief's role in military chain of command saying that although Gen. McGarr had fought for and won on the single... command which had worked for few months, old habits were now returning. Also, on urging from Gen. McGarr he had gone on offensive, but province chiefs had not cooperated to extent necessary. He discussed his inability to get cooperation from GVN agencies on developing overall plans for conduct of counterinsurgency. Minh also discussed need to bring sects back into fold as these are anti-communist. Although above

not new Minh seemed particularly discouraged...When analyzed, most of Minh's comments in military field are occasioned by lack of overall coordination and cooperation. This re-emphasizes absolute necessity for overall plan which would clearly delineate responsibility and create a team effort... 42/

Nolting concerned himself, of course, with the civil as well as military arrangements, but with much the same stress on organizational and administrative formalities. A striking example was when Nolting reported that Diem was willing to consider (in response to American urging of top level administrative reforms) creating a National Executive Council patterned after the U.S. National Security Council. Nolting was favorably impressed. His cable notes no concern that under Diem's proposal, Diem's brother Nhu would be chairman of the NEC, although a year earlier (and of course even more urgently a year or so later) getting Nhu, and his wife, out of the picture entirely had been seen as the best real hope of saving the Diem regime.

The report Nolting sent on Taylor's final meeting with Diem also contains some interesting material. It leaves the impression that Diem was still not really anxious to get American troops deeply involved in his country, despite his favorable reaction at the meeting of the 24th, which, in turn, was a reversal of his reaction at the meeting on the 19th. Because of this, the impression left by the whole record is that Taylor came to the conclusion that some sort of ground troop commitment was needed mainly because of what he heard from Diem's colleagues and his military people, rather than from Diem himself.

According to Nolting's cabled account, Diem, although raising half a dozen issues relating to increased American military aid, did not mention the flood task force, or anything else that might imply a special interest in getting some sort of ground troops commitment. As seemed the case earlier, it was the Americans who pressed the idea of getting American military people involved in combat. In the only exchange Nolting reported touching on this issue, he said:

1. Diem stressed importance of reinforcement of aviation: particularly helicopters. Taylor and I [Nolting] used this opportunity to make clear to Diem that we envisaged helicopters piloted by Americans and constituting American units under American commanders which would cooperate with Vietnamese military commands... 43/

(At a meeting with McGarr November 9, Diem again raised the helicopter question, this time taking the initiative in saying he needed American pilots, but he did not mention the flood task force, or anything else that might imply a request for ground troops.) 44/



On the question of better performance by Diem's regime, we have this exchange, which does not seem likely to have prepared Diem for the fairly substantial quid pro quo which turned out to be part of the package proposed by Washington:

...3. Taylor told Diem it would be useful if he and I could develop specifics with respect to political-psychological point in paper which Taylor presented to Diem October 24. \* Taylor pointed out this would be very useful to him in Washington because he will be faced with question that, if program he proposes is adopted, what will be chances of early success. In response Thuan's question asking for exact meaning of this point in Taylor's paper, latter said there has been loss of confidence among both Vietnamese and American people about situation in Vietnam and we need to determine together what measures can be taken to restore confidence. Rostow commented that secret of turning point is offensive action. Diem stated complete psychological mobilization required so that everything can be done to raise potential GVN forces and damage enemy's potential. He referred to GVN efforts in past to collaborate more closely with US in military planning and said these efforts had run up against wall of secrecy surrounding US and SEATO military plans... 45/

Finally, there was this exchange, which does not appear to provide much support for the high hopes expressed in the Taylor Report that Diem was anxious for U.S. guidance and "in principle" ready to grant a role for Americans in his administration and army.

...4. Taylor referred to Diem's comments in earlier talk about shortage of capable personnel and suggested US might assist by lending personnel. Diem replied that US could help in this respect in training field. Thuan then brought up dilemma facing GVN re instructors at Thui Duc Reserve Officers' School... 46/

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\* Paragraph 12 of Taylor's cable reporting the meeting. Quoted in Section IV, above.

"Actions to emphasize national emergency and beginning of a new phase in the war: we should consider jointly all possible measures to emphasize turning point has been reached in dealing with communist aggression. Possible actions might include appeal to United Nations, an announcement by GVN of governmental changes to cope with crisis and exchange of letters between the two heads of State expressing their partnership in a common cause..." 47/

## THE FAIL DECISIONS - II

### IV.B.

### CHAPTER VI

#### I. CONTEXT

Taylor's formal report, as noted, was dated November 3, a day after the Mission came back to Washington. (A good deal of it had been written during the stopover at Baguio, in the Philippines, when Taylor's personal cables to the President had also been written and sent.) The submission of Taylor's Report was followed by prominent news stories the next morning flatly stating (but without attribution to a source) that the President "remains strongly opposed to the dispatch of American combat troops to South Vietnam" and strongly implying that General Taylor had not recommended such a commitment. 1/ Apparently, only a few people, aside from Taylor, Rostow and a handful of very senior officials, realized that this was not exactly accurate--for the summary paper of the Report had not been very explicit on just what was meant by "a hard commitment to the ground." Thus only those who knew about the "Eyes Only" cables would know just what Taylor was recommending.

Diem himself had given one of his rare on-the-record interviews to the New York Times correspondent in Saigon while Taylor was on his way home, and he too gave the impression that the further American aid he expected would not include ground troops. 2/

Consequently, the general outline of the American aid that would be sent following the Taylor Mission was common knowledge for over a week before any formal decision was made. The decisions, when they were announced stirred very little fuss, and (considering the retrospective importance) not even much interest. The Taylor Mission had received much less attention in the press than several other crises at the UN, in the Congo, on nuclear testing, and most of all in Berlin, where there had just been a symbolic confrontation of Soviet and American tanks. The Administration was so concerned about public reaction to Soviet aggressiveness and apparent American inability to deal with it that a campaign was begun (as usual in matters of this sort, reported in the Times without specific attribution) to "counter-attack against what unnamed 'high officials' called a 'rising mood of national frustration.'" The Administration's message, the Times reported, was that a "mature foreign policy" rather than "belligerence of defeatism" was what was needed. 3/ What is interesting about such a message is what the necessity to send it reveals about the mood of the times.

In this sort of context, there was no real debate about whether the U.S. ought to do anything reasonable it could to prevent Vietnam from going the way of Laos. There is no hint of a suggestion otherwise in the classified record, and there was no real public debate on



this point. What was seen as an issue was whether the limits of reasonable U.S. aid extended to the point of sending American troops to fight the Viet Cong. But even this was subdued. There had been, as noted before, the leaked stories playing down the prospects that combat troops would be sent, and then, immediately on Taylor's return, the unattributed but obviously authoritative stories that Kennedy was opposed to sending troops and Taylor was not recommending them.

In a most important sense, this situation distorts the story told in this account. For this account inevitably devotes a great deal of space to the decision that was not made -- that of sending ground troops -- and very little space to the important decisions that were made. There is simply nothing much to say about these latter decisions: except that they were apparently taken for granted at the time. Even today, with all the hindsight available, it is very hard to imagine Kennedy or any other President responding to the situation faced in 1961 by doing significantly less about Vietnam than he did. The only choices seen then, as indeed even today the only choices seem to have been, whether to do more. And it is on how that question was resolved, inevitably, that any account of the period will be focused.

The Administration faced (contrary to the impression given to the public both before and after the decisions) two major issues when Taylor returned.

1. What conditions, if any, would be attached to new American aid? The Taylor Report implicitly recommended none. But the leaked stories in the press following Taylor's return showed that some in the Administration inclined to a much harder line on Diem than the summary paper of the report. For example, A Times dispatch of November 5, from its Pentagon correspondent, reported that Diem would be expected to "undertake major economic, social, and military reforms to provide a basis for increased U.S. support." 4/

2. Would the limited commitment of ground forces recommended by Taylor be undertaken? The news stories suggested they would, although this would be apparent only to those who had seen Taylor's "Eyes Only" cables. The story appearing the day after the report was submitted, despite the flat statements against the use of combat troops, also stated that Taylor had recommended "the dispatch of more specialists in anti-guerrilla warfare to train Vietnamese troops, communications and transportation specialists, and army engineers to help the Vietnamese government combat its flood problems." The November 5 story was more explicit. It is noted that officials seemed to rule out the use of U.S. combat forces, "the move considered here a few weeks ago." But "at the same time it appears that Army engineers, perhaps in unusually large numbers, may be sent to help on flood control work

and other civil projects and to fight if necessary." This last phrase was explicitly (and correctly) linked to the fact that the area in which the floods had taken place (the Delta) was precisely the area of greatest Viet Cong strength. 5/

A final question of great importance did not have to be resolved during this review: for although the Taylor Report had stressed the idea of eventually bombing the north, no immediate decision or commitment on this was recommended.

On the first of these issues (the quid pro quo for U.S. aid) our record tells us that demands were made on Diem, as we will see when we come to the actual decision. The newspaper stories strongly suggest that the decision to ask for a quid pro quo was made, at the latest, immediately following the return of the Taylor Mission. But the record does not show anything about the reasoning behind this effort to pressure Diem to agree to reforms as a condition for increased U.S. aid, nor of what the point of it was. It certainly conflicted with the main drive of the Taylor Mission Report. The report not only suggested no such thing, but put a great deal of stress on a cordial, intimate relationship with the Diem regime. Pressure for reform (especially when publicly made, as they essentially were in the leaked stories) was hardly likely to promote cordiality. Durbrow's experience earlier in the year had shown that pressure would have the opposite result.

Consequently, the President's handling of this issue had the effect of undermining from the start what appeared to have been a major premise of the strategy recommended to the President: that Diem was "in principle" prepared for what plainly amounted to a "limited partnership," with the U.S. in running his country and his Army. \* 6/

The advantages, from the American view, of the President's decision to place demands on Diem were presumably that it might (contrary to realistic expectations) actually push Diem in the right direction; and that if this did not work, it would somewhat limit the American commitment to Diem. The limit would come by making clear that the U.S. saw a good deal of the problem as Diem's own responsibility, and not just a simple matter of external aggression. The balance of this judgment would turn substantially on whether whoever was making the decision judged that the "limited partnership" idea was really much more realistic than the trying to pressure Diem, and on whether he wanted to limit the U.S. commitment, rather than make it unambiguous. Further, the cables from Saigon had clearly shown that many South Vietnamese were hoping the Americans would put pressure on Diem, so that although such tactics

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\* A cable to Saigon November 4 asked Nolting whether he thought Diem might agree to, among other things, a proposal to establish a National Emergency Council which, in addition to the senior members of Diem's army and administration would include a "mature and hardheaded American...to participate in all decisions."



would prejudice relations with Diem, they would not necessarily harm relations with others of influence in the country, in particular his generals.

Finally, although Kennedy's decisions here were contrary to the implications of the summary paper in the Taylor Report, they were not particularly inconsistent with the appendices by the State representatives. For these, as noted, took a far less rosy view of Diem's prospects than appeared in the summary.

On the second issue -- the U.S. combat military task force -- the available record tells us only the positions of Taylor and of the Defense Department. We are not sure what the position of State was -- although Sorenson claims that all the President's senior advisors had recommended going ahead with sending some ground troops. 7/

Even Taylor's position is slightly ambiguous. It is conceivable that he argued for the Task Force mainly because he thought that the numbers of U.S. personnel that might be sent as advisors, pilots, and other specialists would not add up to a large enough increment to have much of a psychological impact on South Vietnamese morale. But his choice of language indicates that a mere question of numbers was not the real issue. Rather Taylor's argument seems to have been that specifically ground forces (not necessarily all or even mainly infantrymen, but ground soldiers who would be out in the countryside where they could be shot at and shoot back) were what was needed. Combat engineers to work in the VC-infested flood area in the Delta would meet that need. Helicopter pilots and mechanics and advisors, who might accompany Vietnamese operations, but could not undertake ground operations on their own apparently would not. There is only one easily imagined reason for seeing this as a crucial distinction. And that would be if a critical object of the stepped up American program was to be exactly what Taylor said it should be in his final cable from Saigon: "...assuring Diem of our readiness to join him in a military showdown with the Viet Cong ..."  
8/

Thus the flood task force was essentially different from the balance of the military program. It did not fill an urgent need for military specialists or expertise not adequately available within Vietnam; it was an implicit commitment to deny the Viet Cong a victory even if major American ground forces should be required.

Taylor clearly did not see the need for large U.S. ground involvement as at all probable. ("The risks of backing into a major Asian war by way of SVN are present but are not impressive," in large part because "NVN is extremely vulnerable to conventional bombing.") At another point, Taylor warns the President, "If the first contingent is not enough, ... it will be difficult to resist the pressure to reinforce. If the ultimate result sought is the closing of the frontiers and the

cleanup of the insurgents within SVN, there is no limit to our possible commitment (unless we attack the source in Hanoi.)" 9/

We have a good record of the DoD staff work, which preceded the President's decision on this issue, but only a bit from State and none from the White House. Rusk, in a cable from Japan on November 1, contributed this note of caution (which also bears on the previous discussion of demands on Diem for a quid pro quo for increased American aid):

Since General Taylor may give first full report prior my return, believe special attention should be given to critical question whether Diem is prepared take necessary measures to give us something worth supporting. If Diem unwilling trust military commanders to get job done and take steps to consolidate non-communist elements into serious national effort, difficult to see how handful American troops can have decisive influence. While attaching greatest possible importance to security in SEA, I would be reluctant to see U.S. make major additional commitment American prestige to a losing horse.

Suggest Department carefully review all Southeast Asia measures we expect from Diem if our assistance forces us to assume de facto direction South Vietnamese affairs. 10/

But the view of the U.S. Mission in Saigon contained no such doubts, nor did most Vietnamese, according to this cable Nolting sent while Taylor was enroute home:

Our conversations over past ten days with Vietnamese in various walks of life show virtually unanimous desire for introduction U.S. forces into Viet-Nam. This based on unsolicited remarks from cabinet ministers, National Assembly Deputies, University professors, students, shopkeepers, and oppositionists. Dr. Tran Dinh De, level-headed Minister of Health, told Embassy officer Oct 29 that while GVN could continue resist communists for while longer if US troops not introduced, it could not win alone against commies. National Assembly members, according to Lai Tu, leader Personalist Community, unanimously in favor entry US forces. Diem told us while General Taylor was here that he had consulted National Assembly Committee on this question and had received favorable response. Even an oppositionist like Ex-Foreign Minister Tran Van Do has told us US forces are needed and is apparently so strongly convinced of this



that he did not suggest any conditions precedent about political changes by Diem. AmConsul Hue reports that opinion among intellectuals and government officials in that city is also almost unanimously in favor of introduction of American combat troops. MAAG believes on basis private conversations and general attitude Vietnamese military personnel toward us that Vietnamese armed forces would likewise welcome introduction US forces.

General Vietnamese desire for introduction US forces arises from serious morale decline among populace during recent weeks because of deterioration in security and horrible death through torture and mutilation to which Col Nam subjected. Expanded VC infiltration has brought fully home to Vietnamese the fact that US has not intervened militarily in Laos to come to rescue of anti-communists. Now that they see Viet-Nam approaching its own crucial period, paramount question in their minds is whether it will back down when chips are down. Vietnamese thus want US forces introduced in order to demonstrate US determination to stick it out with them against Communists. They do not want to be victims of political settlement with communists. This is especially true of those publicly identified as anti-communist like Dean Vu Quoc Thue who collaborated with Dr. Eugene Staley on Joint Experts Report.

Most Vietnamese whose thoughts on this subject have been developed are not thinking in terms of US troops to fight guerrillas but rather of a reassuring presence of US forces in Viet-Nam. These persons undoubtedly feel, however, that if war in Viet-Nam continues to move toward overt conventional aggression as opposed to its guerrilla character, combat role for US troops could eventually arise. 11/

The special commitment involved in committing even a small force of ground troops was generally recognized. We have notes on an ISA staff paper, for example, which ranked the various types of increased U.S. military aid in ascending order of commitment, and of course, placed the flood task force at the top. According to the notes,

Any combat elements, such as in the task force, would come under attack and would need to defend themselves, committing U.S. prestige deeply. U.S. troops would then be fighting in South Vietnam and could not withdraw under fire. Thus, the introduction of U.S. troops in South Vietnam would

be decisive act and must be sent to achieve a completely decisive mission. This mission would probably require, over time, increased numbers of U.S. troops; DRV intervention would probably increase until a large number of U.S. troops were required, three or more divisions. 12/

This assessment differed from that in General Taylor's cables only in not stressing the hope that a U.S. willingness to bomb the north would deter North Vietnamese escalation of its own commitment.

A special NIE prepared at this time reached essentially the same conclusions.

This SNIE, incidentally, is the only staff paper found in the available record which treats communist reactions primarily in terms of the separate national interests of Hanoi, Moscow, and Peiping, rather than primarily in terms of an overall communist strategy for which Hanoi, is acting as an agent. In particular, the Gilpatric Task Force Report, it will be recalled, began with references to a communist 'master plan' for taking over Southeast Asia. The Taylor Mission Report, similarly, began with a section on "Communist Strategy in Southeast Asia" and opening:

At the present time, the Communists are pursuing a clear and systematic strategy in Southeast Asia. It is a strategy of extending Communist power and influence in ways which bypass U.S. nuclear strength, U.S. conventional naval, air, and ground forces, and the conventional strength of indigenous forces in the area. Their strategy is rooted in the fact that international law and practice does not yet recognize the mounting of guerrilla war across borders as aggression justifying counterattack at the source. 13/

The November 5 SNIE presumably indicates the principal courses of action that were under formal review at the time:

The courses of action here considered were given to the intelligence community for the purposes of this estimate and were not intended to represent the full range of possible courses of action. The given courses of action are:

A. The introduction of a US airlift into and within South Vietnam, increased logistics support, and an increase in MAAG strength to provide US advisers down to battalion level;

B. The introduction into South Vietnam of a US force of about 8,000 - 10,000 troops, mostly engineers with some combat support, in response to an appeal from President Diem for assistance in flood relief;



C. The introduction into the area of a US combat force of 25,000 to 40,000 to engage with South Vietnamese forces in ground, air, and naval operations against the Viet Cong; and

D. An announcement by the US of its determination to hold South Vietnam and a warning, either private or public, that North Vietnamese support of the Viet Cong must cease or the US would launch air attacks against North Vietnam. This action would be taken in conjunction with Course A, B, or C. 14/

These proposed courses of action correspond to those outlined for consideration by the Taylor Mission, with the exception that the flood task force proposed by Taylor has been substituted for the former "intermediate" solution of stationing a token U.S. force at DaNang, and that an opinion is asked on the prospects of threats to bomb the north, again reflecting the Taylor Mission Report. \*

The gist of the SNIE was that North Vietnamese would respond to an increased U.S. commitment with an offsetting increase in infiltrated support for the Viet Cong. Thus, the main difference in the estimated communist reaction to Courses A, B, and C was that each would be stronger than its predecessor. On the prospects for bombing the north, the SNIE implies that threats to bomb would not cause Hanoi to stop its support for the Viet Cong, and that actual attacks on the North would bring a strong response from Moscow and Peiping, who would "regard the defense of North Vietnam against such an attack as imperative." 15/

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\*See Gilpatric memo quoted at conclusion of Section I, Chapter V.

## II. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

On November 8, McNamara sent the following memorandum on behalf of himself, Gilpatric, and the JCS:

### MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The basic issue framed by the Taylor Report is whether the U.S. shall:

a. Commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism, and

b. Support this commitment by necessary immediate military actions and preparations for possible later actions.

The Joint Chiefs, Mr. Gilpatric, and I have reached the following conclusions:

1. The fall of South Vietnam to Communism would lead to the fairly rapid extension of Communist control, or complete accommodation to Communism, in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia. The strategic implications worldwide, particularly in the Orient, would be extremely serious.

2. The chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any measures short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale. We accept General Taylor's judgment that the various measures proposed by him short of this are useful but will not in themselves do the job of restoring confidence and setting Diem on the way to winning his fight.

3. The introduction of a U.S. force of the magnitude of an initial 8,000 men in a flood relief context will be of great help to Diem. However, it will not convince the other side (whether the shots are called from Moscow, Peiping, or Hanoi) that we mean business. Moreover, it probably will not tip the scales decisively. We would be almost certain to get increasingly mired down in an inconclusive struggle.

4. The other side can be convinced we mean business only if we accompany the initial force introduction by a clear commitment to the full objective stated above, accompanied by a warning through some channel to Hanoi that continued support of the Viet Cong will lead to punitive retaliation against North Vietnam.

5. If we act in this way, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment must be faced. The struggle may be prolonged and Hanoi and Peiping may intervene overtly. In view of the



logistic difficulties faced by the other side, I believe we can assume that the maximum U.S. forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia will not exceed 6 divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32-59, Phase IV). Our military posture is, or with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces without serious interference with our present Berlin plans.

6. To accept the stated objective is of course a most serious decision. Military force is not the only element of what must be a most carefully coordinated set of actions. Success will depend on factors many of which are not within our control -- notably the conduct of Diem himself and other leaders in the area. Laos will remain a major problem. The domestic political implications of accepting the objective are also grave, although it is our feeling that the country will respond better to a firm initial position than to courses of action that lead us in only gradually, and that in the meantime are sure to involve casualties. The over-all effect on Moscow and Peiping will need careful weighing and may well be mixed; however, permitting South Vietnam to fall can only strengthen and encourage them greatly.

7. In sum:

a. We do not believe major units of U.S. forces should be introduced in South Vietnam unless we are willing to make an affirmative decision on the issue stated at the start of this memorandum.

b. We are inclined to recommend that we do commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions.

c. If such a commitment is agreed upon, we support the recommendations of General Taylor as the first steps toward its fulfillment.

Sgd: Robert S. McNamara 16/

A number of things are striking about this memorandum, including of course the judgment that the "maximum" U.S. ground forces required, even in the case of overt intervention by not only North Vietnam, but China as well, would "not exceed" 205,000 men. This estimate of the requirement to deal with a large scale overt invasion is consistent with the Chief's earlier estimate that the addition of 40,000 U.S. troops to the South Vietnamese forces would be sufficient to "clean up" the Viet Cong.

But the strongest message to the President in the memorandum (growing out of points 3, 4, and 7c) was surely that if he agreed to sending the military task force, he should be prepared for follow-up recommendations

for re-enforcements and to threaten Hanoi with bombing. Unless the SNIE was wholly wrong, threats to bomb Hanoi would not turn off the war, and Hanoi would increase its infiltration in response to U.S. commitments of troops. Even should Hanoi not react with counter-escalation, the President knew that the Chiefs, at least, were already on record as desiring a prompt build-up to 40,000 ground troops. In short, the President was being told that the issue was not whether to send an 8,000-man task force, but whether or not to embark on a course that, without some extraordinary good luck, would lead to combat involvement in Southeast Asia on a very substantial scale. On the other hand, he was being warned that anything less than sending the task force was very likely to fail to prevent the fall of Vietnam, since "the odds are against, probably sharply against, preventing that fall by any means short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale" (of which the task force would be the first increment).

Although the Chief's position here is clear, because their views are on record in other memoranda, McNamara's own position remains a little ambiguous. For the paper does not flatly recommend going ahead; it only states he and his colleagues are "inclined" to recommend going ahead. Three days later McNamara joined Rusk in a quite different recommendation, and one obviously more to the President's liking (and, in the nature of such things, quite possibly drawn up to the President's specifications).

As with the May revision of the Gilpatric Report, this paper combines an escalation of the rhetoric with a toning down of the actions the President is asked to take. Since the NSAM formalizing the President's decisions was taken essentially verbatim from this paper, the complete text is reprinted here. (The NSAM consisted of the Recommendations section of this memorandum, except that Point 1 of the recommendations was deleted.)

Of particular importance in this second memorandum to the President was Section 4, with its explicit sorting of U.S. military aid into Category A, support forces, which were to be sent promptly; and Category B, "larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions" on which no immediate decision was recommended. There is no explicit reference in the paper to the flood relief task force; it simply does not appear in the list of recommended actions, presumably on the grounds that it goes in Category B. Category B forces, the paper notes, "involve a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South Vietnamese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population."

If McNamara's earlier memorandum is read carefully, the same sort of warning is found, although it sounds much more perfunctory. But that such warnings were included shows a striking contrast with the last go-around in May. Then, the original Defense version of the Gilpatric



Task Force Report contained no hint of such a qualification, and there was only a quite vague warning in the State revisions. Part of the reason, undoubtedly, was the 6 month's additional experience in dealing with Diem. A larger part, though, almost certainly flowed from the fact that the insurgency had by now shown enough strength so that there was now in everyone's minds the possibility that the U.S. might someday face the choice of giving up on Vietnam or taking over a major part of the war.

These warnings (that even a major U.S. commitment to the ground war would not assure success) were obviously in some conflict with the recommendations both papers made for a clear-cut U.S. commitment to save South Vietnam. The contrast is all the sharper in the joint Rusk/McNamara memorandum, where the warning is so forcefully given.

Here is the Rusk/McNamara memorandum. 17/

TOP SECRET

November 11, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: South Viet-Nam

1. United States National Interests in South Viet-Nam.

The deteriorating situation in South Viet-Nam requires attention to the nature and scope of United States national interests in that country. The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would involve the transfer of a nation of 20 million people from the free world to the Communist bloc. The loss of South Viet-Nam would make pointless any further discussion about the importance of Southeast Asia to the free world; we would have to face the near certainty that the remainder of Southeast Asia and Indonesia would move to a complete accommodation with Communism, if not formal incorporation within the Communist bloc. The United States, as a member of SEATO, has commitments with respect to South Viet-Nam under the Protocol to the SEATO Treaty. Additionally, in a formal statement at the conclusion session of the 1954 Geneva Conference, the United States representative stated that the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression . . . with grave concern and seriously threatening international peace and security."

The loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would not only destroy SEATO but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere. Further, loss of South Viet-Nam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration.

## 2. The Problem of Saving South Viet-Nam.

It seems, on the face of it, absurd to think that a nation of 20 million people can be subverted by 15-20 thousand active guerrillas if the Government and people of that country do not wish to be subverted. South Viet-Nam is not, however, a highly organized society with an effective governing apparatus and a population accustomed to carrying civic responsibility. Public apathy is encouraged by the inability of most citizens to act directly as well as by the tactics of terror employed by the guerrillas throughout the countryside. Inept administration and the absence of a strong non-Communist political coalition have made it difficult to bring available resources to bear upon the guerrilla problem and to make the most effective use of available external aid. Under the best of conditions the threat posed by the presence of 15-20 thousand guerrillas, well disciplined under well-trained cadres, would be difficult to meet.

## 3. The United States' Objective in South Viet-Nam.

The United States should commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communist. The basic means for accomplishing this objective must be to put the Government of South Viet-Nam into a position to win its own war against the guerrillas. We must insist that that Government itself take the measures necessary for that purpose in exchange for large-scale United States assistance in the military, economic and political fields. At the same time we must recognize that it will probably not be possible for the GVN to win this war as long as the flow of men and supplies from North Viet-Nam continues unchecked and the guerrillas enjoy a safe sanctuary in neighboring territory.

We should be prepared to introduce United States combat forces if that should become necessary for success. Dependent upon the circumstances, it may also be necessary for United States forces to strike at the source of the aggression in North Viet-Nam.



#### 4. The Use of United States Forces in South Viet-Nam.

The commitment of United States forces to South Viet-Nam involves two different categories: (A) Units of modest size required for the direct support of South Viet-Namese military effort, such as communications, helicopter and other forms of airlift, reconnaissance aircraft, naval patrols, intelligence units, etc., and (B) larger organized units with actual or potential direct military missions. Category (A) should be introduced as speedily as possible. Category (B) units pose a more serious problem in that they are much more significant from the point of view of domestic and international political factors and greatly increase the probabilities of Communist bloc escalation. Further, the employment of United States combat forces (in the absence of Communist bloc escalation) involves a certain dilemma: if there is a strong South-Vietnamese effort, they may not be needed; if there is not such an effort, United States forces could not accomplish their mission in the midst of an apathetic or hostile population. Under present circumstances, therefore, the question of injecting United States and SEATO combat forces should in large part be considered as a contribution to the morale of the South Viet-Namese in their own effort to do the principal job themselves.

#### 5. Probable Extent of the Commitment of United States Forces.

If we commit Category (B) forces to South Viet-Nam, the ultimate possible extent of our military commitment in Southeast Asia must be faced. The struggle may be prolonged, and Hanoi and Peiping may overtly intervene. It is the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in the light of the logistic difficulties faced by the other side, we can assume that the maximum United States forces required on the ground in Southeast Asia would not exceed six divisions, or about 205,000 men (CINCPAC Plan 32/59 PHASE IV). This would be in addition to local forces and such SEATO forces as may be engaged. It is also the view of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that our military posture is, or, with the addition of more National Guard or regular Army divisions, can be made, adequate to furnish these forces and support them in action without serious interference with our present Berlin plans.

#### 6. Relation to Laos.

It must be understood that the introduction of American combat forces into Viet-Nam prior to a Laotian settlement would run a considerable risk of stimulating a Communist breach of the cease fire

and a resumption of hostilities in Laos. This could present us with a choice between the use of combat forces in Laos or an abandonment of that country to full Communist control. At the present time, there is at least a chance that a settlement can be reached in Laos on the basis of a weak and unsatisfactory Souvanna Phouma Government. The prospective agreement on Laos includes a provision that Laos will not be used as a transit area or as a base for interfering in the affairs of other countries such as South Viet-Nam. After a Laotian settlement, the introduction of United States forces into Viet-Nam could serve to stabilize the position both in Viet-Nam and in Laos by registering our determination to see to it that the Laotian settlement was as far as the United States would be willing to see Communist influence in Southeast Asia develop.

#### 7. The Need for Multilateral Action.

From the political point of view, both domestic and international, it would seem important to involve forces from other nations alongside of United States Category (B) forces in Viet-Nam. It would be difficult to explain to our own people why no effort had been made to invoke SEATO or why the United States undertook to carry this burden unilaterally. Our position would be greatly strengthened if the introduction of forces could be taken as a SEATO action, accompanied by units of other SEATO countries, with a full SEATO report to the United Nations of the purposes of the action itself.

Apart from the armed forces, there would be political advantage in elisting the interest of other nations, including neutrals, in the security and well-being of South Viet-Nam. This might be done by seeking such assistance as Malayan police officials (recently offered Diem by the Tunku) and by technical assistance personnel in other fields, either bilaterally or through international organizations.

#### 8. Initial Diplomatic Action by the United States.

If the recommendations, below, are approved, the United States should consult intensively with other SEATO governments to obtain their full support of the course of action contemplated. At the appropriate stage, a direct approach should be made by the United States to Moscow, through normal or special channels, pointing out that we cannot accept the movement of cadres, arms and other supplies into South Viet-Nam in support of the guerrillas. We should also discuss the problem with neutral governments in the general area and get them to face up to their own interests in the security of South Viet-Nam; these governments will be concerned about (a) the introduction of United States combat forces and (b) the withdrawal of United States support from Southeast Asia; their concern, therefore, might be usefully expressed either to Communist bloc countries or in political support for what may prove necessary in South Viet-Nam itself.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the foregoing, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense recommend that:

1. We now take the decision to commit ourselves to the objective of preventing the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism and that, in doing so, we recognize that the introduction of United States and other SEATO forces may be necessary to achieve this objective. (However, if it is necessary to commit outside forces to achieve the foregoing objective our decision to introduce United States forces should not be contingent upon unanimous SEATO agreement thereto.)

2. The Department of Defense be prepared with plans for the use of United States forces in South Viet-Nam under one or more of the following purposes:

(a) Use of a significant number of United States forces to signify United States determination to defend South Viet-Nam and to boost South Viet-Nam morale.

(b) Use of substantial United States forces to assist in suppressing Viet Cong insurgency short of engaging in detailed counter-guerrilla operations but including relevant operations in North Viet-Nam.

(c) Use of United States forces to deal with the situation if there is organized Communist military intervention.

3. We immediately undertake the following actions in support of the GVN:

(a) Provide increased air lift to the GVN forces, including helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft, manned to the extent necessary by United States uniformed personnel and under United States operational control.

(b) Provide such additional equipment and United States uniformed personnel as may be necessary for air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence.

(c) Provide the GVN with small craft, including such United States uniformed advisers and operating personnel as may be necessary for quick and effective operations in effecting surveillance and control over coastal waters and inland waterways.

(d) Provide expedited training and equipping of the civil guard and the self-defense corps with the objective of relieving the regular Army of static missions and freeing it for mobile offensive operations.

(e) Provide such personnel and equipment as may be necessary to improve the military-political intelligence system beginning at the provincial level and extending upward through the Government and the armed forces to the Central Intelligence Organization.

(f) Provide such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel for United States military forces as are required for increased United States participation in the direction and control of GVN military operations and to carry out the other increased responsibilities which accrue to MAAG under these recommendations.

(g) Provide such increased economic aid as may be required to permit the GVN to pursue a vigorous flood relief and rehabilitation program, to supply material in support of the security effort, and to give priority to projects in support of this expanded counter-insurgency program. (This could include increases in military pay, a full supply of a wide range of materials such as food, medical supplies, transportation equipment, communications equipment, and any other items where material help could assist the GVN in winning the war against the Viet Cong.)

(h) Encourage and support (including financial support) a request by the GVN to the FAO or any other appropriate international organization for multilateral assistance in the relief and rehabilitation of the flood area.

(i) Provide individual administrators and advisers for insertion into the Governmental machinery of South Viet-Nam in types and numbers to be agreed upon by the two Governments.

(j) Provide personnel for a joint survey with the GVN of conditions in each of the provinces to assess the social, political, intelligence, and military factors bearing on the prosecution of the counter-insurgency program in order to reach a common estimate of these factors and a common determination of how to deal with them.



4. Ambassador Nolting be instructed to make an immediate approach to President Diem to the effect that the Government of the United States is prepared to join the Government of Viet-Nam in a sharply increased joint effort to cope with the Viet Cong threat and the ravages of the flood as set forth under 3., above, if, on its part, the Government of Viet-Nam is prepared to carry out an effective and total mobilization of its own resources, both material and human, for the same end. Before setting in motion the United States proposals listed above, the United States Government would appreciate confirmation of their acceptability to the GVN, and an expression from the GVN of the undertakings it is prepared to make to insure the success of this joint effort. On the part of the United States, it would be expected that these GVN undertakings would include, in accordance with the detailed recommendations of the Taylor Mission and the Country Team:

(a) Prompt and appropriate legislative and administrative action to put the nation on a wartime footing to mobilize its entire resources. (This would include a decentralization and broadening of the Government so as to realize the full potential of all non-Communist elements in the country willing to contribute to the common struggle.)

(b) The establishment of appropriate Governmental wartime agencies with adequate authority to perform their functions effectively.

(c) Overhaul of the military establishment and command structure so as to create an effective military organization for the prosecution of the war.

5. Very shortly before the arrival in South Viet-Nam of the first increments of United States military personnel and equipment proposed under 3., above, that would exceed the Geneva Accord ceilings, publish the "Jordan report" as a United States "white paper," transmitting it as simultaneously as possible to the Governments of all countries with which we have diplomatic relations, including the Communist states.

6. Simultaneous with the publication of the "Jordan report," release an exchange of letters between Diem and the President.

(a) Diem's letter would include: reference to the DRV violations of Geneva Accords as set forth in the October 24 GVN letter to the ICC and other documents; pertinent references to GVN statements with respect to its intent to observe the Geneva Accords; reference to its need for flood relief and rehabilitation; reference to previous United States aid and the compliance hitherto by both countries with the Geneva Accords; reference to the USG statement at the time the Geneva Accords were signed; the necessity now of exceeding some provisions of the Accords in view of the DRV violations thereof; the lack of aggressive intent with respect to the DRV: GVN intent to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV violations ceased; and request for additional United States assistance in framework foregoing policy. The letter should also set forth in appropriate general terms steps Diem has taken and is taking to reform Governmental structure.

(b) The President's reply would be responsive to Diem's request for additional assistance and acknowledge and agree to Diem's statements on the intent promptly to return to strict compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as DRV violations have ceased.

7. Simultaneous with steps 5 and 6, above, make a private approach to the Soviet Union that would include: our determination to prevent the fall of South Viet-Nam to Communism by whatever means is necessary; our concern over dangers to peace presented by the aggressive DRV policy with respect to South Viet-Nam; our intent to return to full compliance with the Geneva Accords as soon as the DRV does so; the distinction we draw between Laos and South Viet-Nam; and our expectation that the Soviet Union will exercise its influence on the CHICOMS and the DRV.

8. A special diplomatic approach made to the United Kingdom in its role as co-Chairman of the Geneva Conference requesting that the United Kingdom seek the support of the Soviet co-Chairman for a cessation of DRV aggression against South Viet-Nam.

9. A special diplomatic approach also to be made to India, both in its role as Chairman of the ICC and as a power having relations with Peiping and Hanoi. This approach should be made immediately prior to public release of the "Jordan report" and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President.



10. Immediately prior to the release of the "Jordan report" and the exchange of letters between Diem and the President, special diplomatic approaches also to be made to Canada, as well as Burma, Indonesia, Cambodia, Ceylon, the UAR, and Yugoslavia. SEATO, NATO, and OAS members should be informed through those organizations, with selected members also informed individually. The possibility of some special approach to Poland as a member of the ICC should also be considered.

When we reach this memorandum in the record, the decision seems essentially sealed. Kennedy, by every indication in the press at the time and according to the recollections of all the memoirs, was, at the least, very reluctant to send American ground forces to Vietnam, and quite possibly every bit as "strongly opposed" as the leaked news stories depicted him. He now had a joint recommendation from his Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense telling him just what he surely wanted to hear: that a decision on combat forces could be deferred. Consequently, Kennedy's decision on this point can hardly be considered in doubt beyond November 11, although a formal NSC meeting on the question was not held until the 15th. On the question of demands on Diem, again there is no reason to suspect the issue was in doubt any later, at most, than the 11th. The only questions which are in doubt are the extent to which the Rusk/McNamara memorandum simply happened to come to the President in such convenient form, or whether the President arranged it so; and if so, how far this formal paper differed from the real recommendations of the President's senior advisors. The record available gives no basis for even guessing about this. As noted earlier, even McNamara, who is on record with a previous, quite different memorandum, cannot be flatly said to have changed his mind (or been overruled). There is too much room for uncertainty about what he was really up to when he signed the memorandum.

In any event, Kennedy essentially adopted the Rusk/McNamara set of recommendations, although the record is not entirely clear on when he did so. There was an NSC meeting November 5; but although at least the Chairman of the JCS was there, the record shows that even after this meeting there was some uncertainty (or perhaps reluctance) in the JCS about whether the decision had been made. The record shows that McNamara phoned General Lemnitzer to assure him that this was the case. But the cables transmitting the decision to Saigon were dated November 14, the day before the NSC meeting. The formal decision paper (NSAM 111) was not signed until November 22nd. As noted earlier, the NSAM is essentially the recommendations section of the Rusk/McNamara paper, but with the initial recommendation (committing the U.S. to save Vietnam) deleted. 18/

The NSAM was headed "First Phase of Vietnam Program," which, of course, implied that a further decision to send combat troops was in prospect.

Both Sorenson and Hilsman claim this was really a ruse by the President, who had no intention of going ahead with combat troops but did not choose to argue the point with his advisors.

Schlesinger, apparently writing from diary notes, says the President talked to him about the combat troops recommendations at the time, describing the proposed first increment as like an alcoholic's first drink:

The Taylor-Rostow report was a careful and thoughtful document, and the President read it with interest. He was impressed by its description of the situation as serious but not hopeless and attracted by the idea of stiffening the Diem regime through an infusion of American advisers. He did not, however, like the proposal of a direct American military commitment. "They want a force of American troops," he told me early in November. "They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and maintain morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another." The war in Vietnam, he added, could be won only so long as it was their war. If it were ever converted into a white man's war, we would lose as the French had lost a decade earlier. 19/

Whether, in fact, Kennedy had such a firm position in mind at the time cannot be surmised, though, from the official record itself. It is easy to believe that he did, for as Sorenson points out, Kennedy had strong views on the difficulties of foreign troops putting down an insurgency dating from his bleak, but correct, appraisals of French prospects in Vietnam as early as 1951, and again in Algeria in the late 1950's. And he was hardly alone in such sentiments, as shown in columns of the period by Reston and Lippman, and in a private communication from Galbraith to be quoted shortly.

But, Kennedy did not need to have such a firm position in mind to make the decisions he did. There was a case to be made for deferring the combat troops decision even if the President accepted the view that U.S. troops commitments were almost certainly needed in Vietnam and that putting them in sooner would be better than waiting. There was, in particular, the arguments in the Rusk/McNamara memorandum that putting combat troops into Vietnam just then would upset the Laos negotiations, and the unstated but obvious argument that the U.S. perhaps ought to hold back on the combat troop commitment to gain leverage on Diem.

General Taylor's advice, as shown in the record, gave a different ground for delaying. Taylor argued that the ground troop commitment was essentially for its psychological, not military, impact. Taylor's judgment was that it



was "very doubtful" that anything short of a prompt commitment of ground troops would restore South Vietnamese morale. But such a commitment would obviously be a costly step. The President was thoroughly forewarned that such a move would lead both to continual pressure to send more troops and to political difficulties at home that would inevitably flow from the significant casualties that had to be expected to accompany a ground troop commitment. The risk of delaying the ground troop commitment might easily have been judged not worth the certain costs that would accompany it. And of course, in hindsight, we know that the limited program approved by the President was sufficient to put off any imminent collapse of the Diem regime. Consequently, Kennedy's decisions do not tell us just what his view was, and indeed he did not need to have a firmly settled view to make the decision, which after all, was only to put off, not to foreclose a decision to send ground troops. He had only to decide that, on balance, the risks of deferring the troop decision were no worse than the costs of making it, and he could have reached that judgment by any number of routes. The reasons stated in the various papers may or may not accurately reflect the President's state of mind. The only thing we can be sure of is that they conveyed his judgment of the tactically most suitable rationale to put in writing. The most detailed record we have of this rationale and explanation of is the following cable to Nolting:

....Review of Taylor Report has resulted in following basic decisions:

1. Must essentially be a GVN task to contain and reduce the VC threat at present level of capability. Means organizing to go on offensive. We are prepared to contemplate further assistance after joint assessment establishes needs and possibilities of aid more precisely.

2. No amount of extra aid can be substitute for GVN taking measures to permit them to assume offensive and strengthen the administrative and political bases of government.

3. Do not propose to introduce into GVN the US combat troops now, but propose a phase of intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from North. Shall decide later on course of action should infiltration not be radically reduced.

4. On flood, decide best course to treat as primarily civil problem, and occasion should be used to draw in as many nationals of other countries as can be used in GVN flood plan. Have been encouraged this course on advise of : who observed a good thing if some : involved constructively in SVN and subject to VC attack. We prepared to put maximum pressure on FAO. Do not exclude ad hoc US military aid in flood area.

5. Diplomatically position that the violations to be documented in Jordan report and strong references to DRV attack against SVN in DM's letter to Kennedy, need not confirm to the world and Communists that Geneva accords are being disregarded by our increased aid. Need not accuse ourselves publicly, make Communist job easier. GVN should be advised to counter charges by leveling charges against DRV and insisting that if ICC investigates in SVN must equally investigate in NVN. Appreciate approach will make ICC task difficult but will explain position to Canadians and Indians to get their support.
6. A crucial element in USG willingness to move forward is concrete demonstration by Diem that he is now prepared to work in an orderly way on his subordinates and broaden the political base of his regime.
7. Package should be presented as first steps in a partnership in which US is prepared to do more as joint study of facts and GVN performance makes increased US aid possible and productive.
8. Still possible Laotian settlement can be reached pertaining our minimum objective of independent Laos on the basis of a neutral coalition, (although weak and unsatisfactory), headed by Souvanna. Would include provision Laos not be used as transit area or base for interference in SVN. Therefore must keep in mind impact of action in SVN or prospects for acceptable Laos settlement.
9. Introduction of US or Sento forces into SVN before Laotian settlement might wreck chances for agreement, lead to break up of Geneva conference, break L's cease fire by communists with resumption of hostilities.
10. Decision to introduce US combat forces in GVN would have to be taken in light of GVN effort, including support from people, Laotian situation, Berlin crisis, readiness of allies or sharply increased tension with Bloc, and enormous responsibilities which would have to be borne by US in event of escalation SEA or other areas.
11. Hope measures outlined in instructions will galvanize and supplement GVN effort, making decision on use of US combat forces unnecessary and no need for decision in effect to shift primary responsibility for defense of SVN to USG.
12. We are fully cognizant of extent to which decisions if implemented through Diem's acceptance will sharply increase the commitment of our prestige struggle to save SVN.



13. Very strictly for your own information, DOD has been instructed to prepare plans for the use of US combat forces in SVN under various contingencies, including stepped up infiltration as well as organized inventory (sic) military intervention. However objective of our policy is to do all possible to accomplish purpose without use of US combat forces. 20/

An accompanying cable also provided this additional comment on troops question:

...4. It is anticipated that one of the first questions President Diem will raise with you after your presentation of the above joint proposals will be that of introducing U.S. combat troops. You are authorized to remind him that the actions we already have in mind involve a substantial number of U.S. military personnel for operational duties in Viet-Nam and that we believe that these forces performing crucial missions can greatly increase the capacity of GVN forces to win their war against the Viet Cong. You can also tell him that we believe that the missions being undertaken by our forces, under present circumstances, are more suitable for white foreign troops than garrison duty or missions involving the seeking out of Viet Cong personnel submerged in the Viet-Nam population. You can assure him that the USG at highest levels will be in daily contact with the situation in Viet-Nam and will be in constant touch with him about requirements of the situation.... 20a/

### III. AFTERMATH

The President's decisions were apparently sent to Nolting on the 14th, in a cable that is taken essentially verbatim from the description of the Rusk/McNamara memorandum (paragraphs 3 and 4) of the program the U.S. was offering and the response expected from Diem. But the cable added some new language, putting still more emphasis on pressuring Diem:

...It is most important that Diem come forth with changes which will be recognized as having real substance and meaning. Rightly or wrongly, his regime is widely criticized abroad and in the U.S., and if we are to give our substantial support we must be able to point to real administrative political and social reforms and a real effort to widen its base that will give maximum confidence to the American people, as well as to world opinion that our efforts are not directed towards the support of an unpopular or ineffective regime, but rather towards supporting the combined efforts of all the non-Communist people of the GVN against a Communist take-over. You should make this quite clear, and indicate that the U.S. contribution to the proposed joint effort depends heavily upon his response to this point.

You should inform Diem that, in our minds, the concept of the joint undertaking envisages a much closer relationship than the present one of acting in an advisory capacity only. We would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affect the security situation. 21/

Overall, then, what Kennedy ended up doing was to offer Diem a good deal less than he was expecting, and nevertheless to couple this offer with demands on Diem for which, on the basis of the available record, we can only assume he was totally unprepared. Nolting's first cable, though, reported Diem listened quietly and "took our proposals rather better than I expected."

Here are some extracts:

...As anticipated [by Washington], his first question was re introduction US combat troops. I replied along line para 4 reftel....

Diem said that he presumed I realized that our proposals involved the question of the responsibility of the Government of Viet Nam. Viet Nam, he said, did not want to be a protectorate.

I said that this was well understood; we for our part did not wish to make it one. Diem also pointed out that GVN was constantly in process of making reforms but major action could not be taken without thorough consideration and without having always in mind



that there was a war to be won. Object was to restore order, not to create disorder. I said I recognized that this was a delicate judgment, in my opinion, as a friend of his country and of him, his greater risk was to stand pat, or act too cautiously...

On the whole, I am not discouraged at Diem's reaction. In fact, he took our proposals rather better than I had expected. He has promised to call me as soon as he has been able to reflect upon our proposals and, until we have heard his considered reaction, I think it would be idle to speculate on outcome... 22/

On the 20th, Nolting met with Thuan, who among other things said the U.S. offer had set Diem to wondering "whether U.S. getting ready to back out on Vietnam...as we had done in Laos." Nolting hoped Thuan's bleak report was only a bargaining tactic.

Thuan said that Diem had not yet discussed fully with him US proposals presented last Friday; but had given him impression of being 'very sad and very disappointed.' Thuan said Diem had said he now hesitates to put proposals before even his cabinet ministers, fearing that they would be disappointed and lose heart. He had intended to discuss US proposals with both cabinet and selected members of assembly who had been consulted re advisability of US forces at time of Taylor Mission, but now thought contrast between his earlier question and our proposals too striking. Thuan conveyed impression that Diem is brooding over US proposals and has made no move yet to develop specific ideas on actions GVN expected to take. Thuan said President's attitude seemed to be that US asking great concessions of GVN in realm its sovereignty, in exchange for little additional help; that this is great disappointment after discussions with General Taylor involving, in particular, concept of Delta Task Force; that Diem seemed to wonder whether US was getting ready to back out on Viet Nam, as he suggested, we had done in Laos. 23/

There followed a long discussion in which Thuan described all the difficulties that would be involved in doing what the U.S. was asking, including the risk of looking like a U.S. puppet.

There is nothing in our record to indicate any U.S. reconsideration of the decision against sending the military task force. Thus, if Diem and Thuan's response was a bargaining tactic to get the task force, it failed. On the other hand, if Diem was using disappointment over the failure to send the task force as a bargaining counter to get the U.S. to relent on its demands for reforms, then he got just what he wanted. But what amounted to a complete U.S. reversal on these demands also may have been influenced by the advice Kennedy received from John Kenneth Galbraith at this time. Kennedy had asked Galbraith to stop by Saigon on his return to

India. Galbraith did so, and after three days cabled back, among other things, the advice that it was a waste of effort to bargain with Diem.

On the 20th, the day of Thuan's meeting with Nolting, Galbraith cabled the President:

There is scarcely the slightest practical chance that the administrative and political reforms now being pressed upon Diem will result in real change....there is no solution that does not involve a change in government.

On the insurgency, though, Galbraith was optimistic, provided Diem was replaced:

While situation is indubitably bad military aspects seem to me out of perspective. A comparatively well-equipped army with paramilitary formations number a quarter million men is facing a maximum of 15-18,000 lightly armed men. If this were equality, the United States would hardly be safe against the Sioux. I know the theories about this kind of warfare....Given even a moderately effective government and putting the relative military power into perspective, I can't help thinking the insurgency might very soon be settled. 24/

The following day, Galbraith, now in New Delhi, sent a more detailed appraisal, covering essentially the same ground. Here are some extracts.

... THE VIET CONG INSURRECTION IS STILL GROWING IN EFFECT. THE OUTBREAK ON THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS IS MATCHED BY A POTENTIALLY EVEN MORE DAMAGING IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY AND ESPECIALLY ON THE MOVEMENT OF RICE TO SAIGON.

IN THE ABSENCE OF KNOWLEDGE OF THE ADMIXTURE OF TERROR AND ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EVANGELISM WE HAD BEST ASSUME THAT IT IS EMPLOYING BOTH. WE MUST NOT FOREVER BE GUIDED BY THOSE WHO MISUNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF REVOLUTION AND IMAGINE THAT BECAUSE THE COMMUNISTS DO NOT APPEAL TO US THEY ARE ABHORRENT TO EVERYONE.

IN OUR ENTHUSIASM TO PROVE OUTSIDE INTERVENTION BEFORE WORLD OPINION WE HAVE UNQUESTIONABLY EXAGGERATED THE ROLE OF MATERIAL ASSISTANCE ESPECIALLY



IN THE MAIN AREA OF INSURRECTION IN THE FAR SOUTH. THAT LEADERS AND RADIO GUIDANCE COME IN WE KNOW. BUT THE AMOUNT OF AMMUNITION AND WEAPONRY THAT A MAN CAN CARRY ON HIS BACK FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED KILOMETERS OVER JUNGLE TRAILS WAS NOT INCREASED APPRECIABLY BY MARX. NO MAJOR CONFLICT CAN DEPEND ON SUCH LOGISTIC SUPPORT.

A MAXIMUM OF 18,000 LIGHTLY ARMED MEN ARE INVOLVED IN THE INSURRECTION. THESE ARE GVN ESTIMATES AND THE FACTOR OF EXAGGERATION IS UNQUESTIONABLY CONSIDERABLE. TEN THOUSAND IS MORE PROBABLE. WHAT WE HAVE IN OPPOSITION INVOLVES A HEAVY THEOLOGICAL DISPUTE. DIEM IT IS SAID IS A GREAT BUT DEFAMED LEADER. IT IS ALSO SAID HE HAS LOST TOUCH WITH THE MASSES, IS IN POLITICAL DISREPUTE AND OTHERWISE NO GOOD. THIS DEBATE CAN BE BYPASSED BY AGREED POINTS. IT IS AGREED THAT ADMINISTRATIVELY DIEM IS EXCEEDINGLY BAD. HE HOLDS FAR TOO MUCH POWER IN HIS OWN HANDS, EMPLOYS HIS ARMY BADLY, HAS NO INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION WORTHY OF THE NAME, HAS ARBITRARY OR INCOMPETENT SUBORDINATES IN THE PROVINCES AND SOME ACHIEVEMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING, HAS A POOR ECONOMIC POLICY. HE HAS ALSO EFFECTIVELY RESISTED IMPROVEMENT FOR A LONG WHILE IN FACE OF HEAVY DETERIORATION. THIS IS ENOUGH. WHETHER HIS POLITICAL POSTURE IS NEPOTIC, DESPOTIC OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE VILLAGERS AND HENCE DAMAGING OR WHETHER THIS DAMAGE IS THE FIGMENT OF SAIGON INTELLECTUALS DOES NOT BEAR ON OUR IMMEDIATE POLICY AND MAY BE BY-PASSED AT LEAST IN PART.

THE SVN ARMY NUMBERS 170,000 AND WITH PARAMILITARY UNITS OF THE CIVIL GUARD AND HOME DEFENSE FORCES A QUARTER OF A MILLION. WERE THIS WELL DEPLOYED

ON BEHALF OF AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS THAT THE VIET CONG WOULD HAVE NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS OR TAKEOVER. WASHINGTON IS CURRENTLY HAVING AN INTELLECTUAL ORGASM ON THE UNBEATABILITY OF GUERRILLA WAR. WERE GUERRILLAS EFFECTIVE IN A RATIO OF ONE TO FIFTEEN OR TWENTY-FIVE IT IS OBVIOUS THAT NO GOVERNMENT WOULD BE SAFE. THE VIET CONG, IT SHOULD BE NOTED, IS STRONGEST IN THE SOUTHERN DELTA WHICH IS NOT JUNGLE BUT OPEN RICE PADDY.

THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTIES IN COUNTERING THE INSURGENCY, APART FROM ABSENCE OF INTELLIGENCE, ARE TWO-FOLD. FIRST IS THE POOR COMMAND, DEPLOYMENT, TRAINING, MORALE AND OTHER WEAKNESSES OF THE ARMY AND PARAMILITARY FORCES. AND SECOND WHILE THEY CAN OPERATE - - SWEEP - - THROUGH ANY PART OF THE COUNTRY AND CLEAR OUT ANY VISIBLE INSURGENTS, THEY CANNOT GUARANTEE SECURITY AFTERWARDS. THE VIET CONG COMES BACK AND PUTS THE ARM ON ALL WHO HAVE COLLABORATED. THIS FACT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN RELATION TO REQUESTS FROM AMERICAN MANPOWER. OUR FORCES WOULD CONDUCT THE ROUND-UP OPERATIONS WHICH THE RVN ARMY CAN ALREADY DO. WE COULDN'T CONCEIVABLY SEND ENOUGH MEN TO PROVIDE SAFETY FOR THE VILLAGES AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR AN EFFECTIVELY TRAINED CIVIL GUARD AND HOME DEFENSE FORCE AND, PERHAPS, A POLITICALLY COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY.

THE KEY AND INESCAPABLE POINT, THEN, IS THE INEFFECTUALITY (ABETTED DEBATABLE BY THE UNPOPULARITY) OF THE DIEM GOVERNMENT. THIS IS THE STRATEGIC FACTOR. NOR CAN ANYONE ACCEPT THE STATEMENT OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN EITHER TOO LONG OR TOO LITTLE IN ASIA THAT HIS IS THE INEVITABLE POSTURE OF THE



ASIAN MANDARIN. FOR ONE THING IT ISN'T TRUE, BUT WERE IT SO THE ONLY POSSIBLE CONCLUSION WOULD BE THAT THERE IS NO FUTURE FOR MANDARINS. THE COMMUNISTS DON'T FAVOR THEM.

I COME NOW TO A LESSER MISCALCULATION, THE ALLEGED WEAKENING EMPHASIS OF THE MEKONG FLOOD. FLOODS IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD ARE AN OLD TRAP FOR WESTERN NON-AGRICULTURISTS. THEY ARE JUDGED BY WHAT THE OHIO DOES TO ITS TOWNS. NOW AS THE FLOOD WATERS RECEDE IT IS ALREADY EVIDENT THAT THIS FLOOD CONFORMS TO THE ASIAN PATTERN, ONE REPEATED EVERY YEAR IN INDIA. THE MUD VILLAGES WILL SOON GROW AGAIN. SOME UPLAND RICE WAS DROWNED BECAUSE THE WATER ROSE TOO RAPIDLY. NEARER THE COAST THE PRESSURE ON THE BRACKISH WATER WILL PROBABLY BRING AN OFFSETTING IMPROVEMENT. NEXT YEAR'S CROP WILL BE MUCH BETTER FOR THE SILT.

I COME NOW TO POLICY, FIRST THE BOX WE ARE IN PARTLY AS THE RESULT OF RECENT MOVES AND SECOND HOW WE GET OUT WITHOUT A TAKEOVER. WE HAVE JUST PROPOSED TO HELP DIEM IN VARIOUS WAYS IN RETURN FOR A PROMISE OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL REFORMS. SINCE THE ADMINISTRATIVE (AND POSSIBLY POLITICAL) INEFFECTUALITY ARE THE STRATEGIC FACTORS FOR SUCCESS THE ABILITY TO GET REFORMS IS DECISIVE. WITH THEM THE NEW AID AND GADGETRY WILL BE USEFUL. WITHOUT THEM THE HELICOPTERS, PLANES AND ADVISER'S WON'T MAKE APPRECIABLE DIFFERENCE.

IN MY COMPLETELY CONSIDERED VIEW, AS STATED YESTERDAY, DIEM WILL NOT REFORM EITHER ADMINISTRATIVELY OR POLITICALLY IN ANY EFFECTIVE

WAY. THAT IS BECAUSE HE CANNOT. IT IS POLITICALLY NAIVE TO EXPECT IT. HE SENSES THAT HE CANNOT LET POWER GO BECAUSE HE WOULD BE THROWN OUT. HE MAY DISGUISE THIS EVEN FROM HIMSELF WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE LACKS EFFECTIVE SUBORDINATES BUT THE CIRCUMSTANCE REMAINS UNCHANGED. HE PROBABLY SENSES THAT HIS GREATEST DANGER IS FROM THE ARMY. HENCE THE REFORM THAT WILL BRING EFFECTIVE USE OF HIS MANPOWER, THOUGH THE MOST URGENT MAY BE THE MOST IMPROBABLE.

THE POLITICAL REFORMS ARE EVEN MORE UNLIKELY BUT THE ISSUE IS ACADEMIC. ONCE THE IMAGE OF A POLITICIAN IS FIXED, WHETHER AMONG OPPOSITION INTELLECTUALS OR PEASANTS, IT IS NOT CHANGED. NOR DO POLITICIANS CHANGE THEMSELVES. DIEM'S IMAGE WOULD NOT BE CHANGED BY HIS TAKING IN OTHER NON-COMMUNISTS, INITIATING SOME SOCIAL REFORMS OR OTHERWISE MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR DEMARCHE.

HOWEVER HAVING STARTED ON THIS HOPELESS GAME WE HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE, BUT TO PLAY IT OUT FOR A MINIMUM TIME. THOSE WHO THINK THERE IS HOPE OF REFORM WILL HAVE TO BE PERSUADED.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a cliché that there is no alternative to Diem's regime. This is politically naive. Where one man has dominated the scene for good or ill there never seems to be. No one considered Truman an alternative to Roosevelt. There is none for Nehru. There was none I imagine for Rhee. This is an optical illusion arising from the fact that the eye is fixed on the visible figures. It is a better rule that nothing succeeds like success-  
ors.

We should not be alarmed by the Army as an alternative. It would buy time and get a fresh dynamic. It is not ideal; civilian rule is ordinarily more durable and more saleable to the world.



But a change and a new start is of the essence and in considering opinion we may note that Diem's flavor is not markedly good in Asia.

A time of crisis in our policy on South Vietnam will come when it becomes evident that the reforms we have asked have not come off and that our presently proffered aid is not accomplishing anything. Troops will be urged to back up Diem. It will be sufficiently clear that I think this must be resisted. Our soldiers would not deal with the vital weakness. They could perpetuate it. They would enable Diem to continue to concentrate on protecting his own position at the expense of countering the insurgency. Last spring, following the Vice President's promise of more aid, proposals for increased and reform taxes which were well advanced were promptly dropped. The parallel on administrative and political reform could be close.

It will be said that we need troops for a show of strength and determination in the area. Since the troops will not deal with fundamental faults -- since there can't be enough of them to give security to the countryside -- their failure to provide security could create a worse crisis of confidence. You will be aware of my general reluctance to move in troops. On the other hand I would note that it is those of us who have worked in the political vineyard and who have committed our hearts most strongly to the political fortunes of the New Frontier who worry most about its bright promise being sunk under the rice fields. Dulles in 1954 saw the dangers in this area. Dean Acheson knew he could not invest men in Chiang.

\* \* \* \*

My overall feeling is that despite the error implicit in this last move and the supposition that Diem can be reformed, the situation is not hopeless. It is only hopeless if we marry our course to that of a man who must spend more time protecting his own position and excluding those who threaten it than in fighting the insurgency. Diem's calculation instinctive or deliberate is evident. He has already been deposed once and not by the Communists. He can see his clear and present danger as well as anyone. 25/

Two things are particularly worth noting about Galbraith's advice: the first, to the extent it had an influence on Kennedy, it counselled him to avoid sending troops, but also not to take seriously the quid pro quo with Diem because Diem was not going to do anything anyway. Consequently, Galbraith, with a limitlessly bleak view of the prospects for success under Diem, really had no quarrel with those who argued against putting pressure on Diem and for trying to win his confidence. He had no argument, because he thought both approaches (pressure and no pressure) were equally hopeless. And indeed, both had been tried during the year --

the pressure approach in the CIP negotiations; the "get on his wave length" approach following the Task Force review -- and both produced an identical lack of results.

Second, Galbraith's analysis of the situation really has a good deal in common with that of the Taylor Mission. Obviously, he thought we must be rid of Diem, and he apparently thought it was a mistake to put this move off by making new aid offers to Diem rather than letting word get around that we would be prepared to offer more support to Vietnam if Diem should be removed. But at this time, even people like Galbraith (and Schelsinger, as is clear from his memoir) saw no alternative to continuing to support Vietnam, although not to continuing to support Diem personally. Galbraith was, if anything, more optimistic about the chances of putting down the insurgency (given a change in Saigon) than was the Taylor Report. For his optimism was not at all contingent on any hopes of the efficacy of bombing threats against the north. For all we know, he may have been right in supposing any "moderately effective" Saigon government could do all right against the insurgents; but we now know all too well how over-optimistic was his fairly confident expectation that a military replacement of the Diem regime would be at least moderately effective.

To return to the negotiations in Saigon, in late November, we now had the following situation:

1. It was clear that Diem was, to say the least, disappointed with the bargain Kennedy had proposed.
2. Kennedy was obviously aware that he had offered Diem less than Diem expected, and demanded much more in return.
3. Both supporters of Diem, like Lansdale and Kenneth Young, and his severest critics, like Galbraith, were agreed that it was futile to try to force Diem to reform. Kennedy had already had his own experiences with such efforts earlier in the year.
4. Presumably, although we have nothing to show it in the available record, there was some unrest within the Administration about the limited offer that was being made, the demands being pressed, and the delay it was all causing. To put off an agreement too long raised the dual threat of an awkward public squabble and renewed pressure on the President to send the task force after all.

It is hard to think of any realistic counter-arguments to the case for settling the dispute and get on with either trying to do better in the war, or get rid of Diem.

The next phase was a brief flurry of anti-American stories in the government-controlled Saigon press. The U.S. was accused, among other



things, of trying to use Vietnam as a "pawn of capitalist imperialism." 26/ Nolting went to Diem to complain about the damage that such stories would do to U.S.-Vietnamese relations. But Diem disclaimed responsibility, and suggested they were an understandable reaction of the South Vietnamese to what they had learned about the U.S. proposals from U.S. press reports. Nolting's final comment in his report on this meeting was a suggestion that the U.S. concentrate on "efficiency in GVN rather than on more nebulous and particularly offensive to Diem concept of political reform." 27/ The impression given by the cable is that Nolting felt on the defensive, which was probably the case since the package Washington had proposed must have been disappointing to him as well as to Diem.

It did not take long for Washington to back away from any hard demands on Diem. A sentence from the original guidance telegram stated "we would expect to share in the decision-making process in the political, economic and military fields as they affected the security situation"...as opposed to the previous arrangement of "acting in an advisory capacity only." 28/ Alexis Johnson and Rostow drafted a cable on December 7 that "clarified" this and a number of other points to which Diem had strongly objected, in this case to explain that,

...what we have in mind is that, in operations directly related to the security situation, partnership will be so close that one party will not take decisions or actions affecting the other without full and frank prior consultations... 29/

This was quite a comedown from the idea that American involvement in the Vietnamese government should be so intimate that the government could be reformed "from the bottom up" despite Diem. Once the U.S. backed away from any tough interpretation of its proposals, agreement was fairly easily reached with Diem, and one of the usual fine sounding statements of agreed principles and measures was drawn up.

On one seemingly modest request from Diem, Washington was curiously firm. Diem repeatedly, both while the Taylor Mission was in Saigon, and after its return, asked for Lansdale to be sent. (Our record shows four such requests, one directly by Diem to Taylor; a second from Thuan; and in a memorandum to McNamara William Bundy referred to two further requests relayed through McGarr.) Cottrell, the senior State representative on the Taylor Mission, strongly endorsed sending Lansdale, and the main paper of the Taylor Report seemed to endorse the idea. William Bundy was in favor of sending Lansdale, and Lansdale wanted to go. But nothing happened. Lansdale never got to Vietnam until Cabot Lodge brought him out late in 1965.

The first contingents of helicopters arrived in Saigon December 11 (having been put to sea several weeks earlier). On the following day a New York Times dispatch from Saigon began:

Two United States Army helicopter companies arrived here today. The helicopters, to be flown and serviced by United States troops, are the first direct military support by the United States for South Vietnam's war against Communist guerrilla forces.

The craft will be assigned to the South Vietnamese Army in the field, but they will remain under United States Army control and operation.

At least 33 H-21C twin-rotor helicopters, their pilots and ground crews, an estimated total of 400 men, arrived aboard the Military Sea Transportation Service aircraft ferry Core. 30/

The Times story ended by describing the force as "the first fruits" of the Taylor Mission, with more to come. The Times did not find the story important enough to put it on the front page.

A day later, the Times published a story about the ICC reaction to the arrival of the helicopters. It began:

The International Control Commission for Vietnam was reported today to be considering whether to continue functioning here in the face of an increase in United States assistance to South Vietnam's struggle against Communist guerrillas.

The Commission, made up of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland, has been holding emergency sessions since the arrival here yesterday of a United States vessel loaded with at least 33 helicopters and operating and maintenance crews. 31/

A few paragraphs later, the dispatch noted that:

With the arrival yesterday of the Core, a former escort carrier, bearing the helicopters, four single-engine training planes and about 400 men, the United States military personnel here now are believed to total about 1,500. Many more are expected. 32/

Again, the Times ran the story on an inside page.

Finally, on the 15th, a formal exchange of letters between Presidents Diem and Kennedy was published, announcing in general terms a stepped-up U.S. aid program for Vietnam.